

## Gro Harlem Brundtland

First woman Prime Minister of Norway and Deputy Chair of The Elders; a medical doctor who champions health as a human right; put sustainable development on the international agenda.

- Deputy Chair of The Elders 2013-2018
- Norway's first woman Prime Minister
- Director-General of the World Health Organization 1998-2003
- UN Special Envoy on Climate Change 2007-2010

*"We are individuals who are speaking without any outside pressures. In that context we can create the potential for change."*

## Work with The Elders

Gro Harlem Brundtland has been a member of The Elders since its founding in 2007, bringing to the group her decades of experience as a global leader in public health and sustainable development. She served as Deputy Chair from May 2013 to August 2018. She assumed the role of Acting Chair following the death of Kofi Annan in August 2018, until Mary Robinson's appointment as Chair in October 2018.

As part of The Elders' peace-building agenda, Prime Minister Brundtland joined The Elders' first delegation to Israel and the West Bank in August 2009 to support efforts to advance [Middle East peace](#) – paying particular attention to the impact of the conflict on ordinary Israelis and Palestinians. She has travelled to Greece, Turkey and [Cyprus](#) to encourage reconciliation between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. In April 2011 she joined an Elders delegation to the [Korean Peninsula](#) and China in an effort to improve relations between North and South Korea.

A staunch advocate of gender equality as a prerequisite for development, Prime Minister Brundtland travelled to Ethiopia in June 2011 to meet communities affected by [child marriage](#) and bring together experts and activists working to end this harmful practice. In February 2012 she travelled to India, where the Elders lent their support to youth activists tackling early marriage at the local level.

Dubbed the “godmother of sustainable development”, she was also part of [Elders+Youngers](#), an intergenerational dialogue between four Elders and four young change-makers during the Rio+20 summit in June 2012.

In October 2012, Gro Harlem Brundtland was on the Elders delegation visiting the Middle East to draw attention to the imperilled two-state solution in [Israel and Palestine](#) and to lend their support to the [Egyptian](#) democratic transition. Gro Harlem Brundtland joined The Elders delegation to Israel and Palestine again in May 2015. During the trip, The Elders continued to support the need for a two-state solution, Palestinian reconciliation and the perilous situation in Gaza.

Gro Harlem Brundtland has been an active part of The Elders’ [Myanmar](#) initiative. She visited the country in September 2013, where she and other Elders met with leaders and civil society representatives involved in supporting the peace process with ethnic minority armed groups and addressed ongoing violence in Rakhine state. In March 2014 she returned with Martti Ahtisaari where they visited Mae La refugee camp and Mae Tao Clinic, on the Thailand-Myanmar border and saw the resilience of those living in exile. In December 2014, she led the Elders’ delegation to Myanmar where they met with representatives from the government, the military and civil society including ethnic women’s groups. The Elders called on the warring parties to end their fighting and discussed opportunities for building a new and inclusive federal state, including the 2015 election.

Prime Minister Brundtland joined The Elders delegation to **Moscow** in April 2015. Led by Kofi Annan, Gro Harlem Brundtland along with Martti Ahtisaari, Lakhdar Brahimi, Jimmy Carter and Ernesto Zedillo visited Russia to discuss key geopolitical issues. During the trip, The Elders met with President Vladimir Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, as well as former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

In September 2015, Gro Harlem Brundtland travelled to New York with Hina Jilani, Graça Machel and Ernesto Zedillo to celebrate the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals. During the trip, Prime Minister Brundtland participated in two events as part of The Elders [UN Fit for purpose](#) initiative and the Social Good Summit, hosted by the UN Foundation and Mashable.

### **‘Mother of the nation’**

Gro Harlem Brundtland was seven years old when she enrolled in the children’s section of the Norwegian Labour Movement. She has been a member ever since, and has led the Labour Party to electoral victory three times.

After spending 10 years as a physician and scientist in the Norwegian public health system, Gro Harlem Brundtland was appointed Prime Minister for the first time 1981. Aged 41, she was both the youngest person and the first woman to hold the office in Norway.

She served for more than 10 years as Prime Minister over three terms until 1996, during which time women's representation in government significantly increased. A popular leader, Prime Minister Brundtland is affectionately known by Norwegians as 'Landsmoderen' or 'mother of the nation'.

### **Public health and environmental champion**

Few people have had an impact on society as global as Prime Minister Brundtland's. As Norway's Environment Minister from 1974 to 1979, she began to realise her vision of extending health beyond the confines of the medical world into environmental issues and human development. From 1983, as the Chair of the World Commission of Environment and Development (known as the Brundtland Commission) she put sustainable development on the international agenda with the Commission's landmark report [Our Common Future](#) in 1987.

A physician and Master of Public Health (Harvard) by training, Gro Harlem Brundtland served as Director-General of the [World Health Organization](#) from 1998 to 2003, gaining recognition for successfully negotiating an agreement on tobacco control, increasing access to life-saving drugs, working towards polio eradication and promoting awareness of the links between poverty and disease.

Prime Minister Brundtland was a member of the United Nations Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Global Sustainability 2011-2012, and serves on the Board of the United Nations Foundation. She was:

- Member of the Palme Commission on Security and Disarmament, 1980s
- Member of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, 2008-2010
- Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General on Climate Change, 2007-2010