

The Elders encourage plans for truth and reconciliation process in Côte d'Ivoire

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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An Elders' delegation has completed a two-day visit to Côte d'Ivoire to encourage reconciliation and healing. Their visit follows four months of post-election violence in which an estimated 3,000 people were killed and one million displaced.

Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan led the delegation - joined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and the former President of Ireland Mary Robinson.

The Elders sought to listen to a wide range of views during their visit. They met the new President of Côte d'Ivoire Alassane Ouattara, Prime Minister Guillaume Soro and members of his Cabinet, as well as representatives of all major political parties, civil society and women's organisations. They also travelled to the north of the country to meet former president Laurent Gbagbo. On Sunday evening the three Elders visited a church in Abidjan which is providing temporary shelter to some 1,400 internally displaced people.

Their discussions with the government covered a range of important issues for Côte d'Ivoire including security and disarmament, accountability and justice, the revival of the economy, youth unemployment and the empowerment of women. They emphasised the importance of improving security so that people feel safe enough to return to their homes, reopen their businesses, send their children back to school and carry out other normal activities.

The Elders were impressed by the President's and his government's determination to improve security as quickly as possible, revitalise the economy and provide assistance to displaced persons.

President Ouattara and the Elders discussed the government's plans to establish a truth and reconciliation commission in Côte d'Ivoire. The Elders welcomed the President's prioritisation of reconciliation and healing, but emphasised that the process should be independent, consultative, and not be rushed.

Delegation leader Kofi Annan said: "We are encouraged by the President's willingness, and that of many of the people we met, to move forward in a spirit of reconciliation, but much of society is still polarised. People are fearful and still define themselves in terms of their differences, rather than the common ground they share. Achieving reconciliation will take time and cannot succeed without honest

and inclusive dialogue. Every Ivorian has a part to play and the role of government is to ensure that they are able to do so.”

Desmond Tutu, who chaired South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, said: “One of the lessons we learned in South Africa is that people must trust the reconciliation process and feel a sense of ownership of it. Issues that are overlooked today can become challenges later. A successful truth and reconciliation process requires wide consultation and ideally the commission plan should be approved by parliament. It is positive that the President has announced plans for a commission, but we urge him not to rush.”

Mary Robinson raised the role of women in peace-building with President Ouattara: “We encountered men and women of great courage, aligned to different sides of the recent conflict, who were willing to come together to meet us and who spoke eloquently about the need for truth, reconciliation and justice. They emphasised that accountability for human rights violations should be applied to all those involved, warning against perceptions of ‘victor’s justice’. I want to highlight the role that women should play in all stages of the country’s healing and reconstruction – they have much to offer and should have a seat at the table. I am pleased that the President responded positively to this message.”

This morning the three Elders flew to Korhogo in the north of the country to meet former president Laurent Gbagbo, who is under house arrest. He appeared to be healthy and in good spirits, and told the Elders he is being well treated. The Elders stressed their message of support for healing and reconciliation of the nation. This requires all Ivorians to play their part. They were pleased to hear Mr Gbagbo say that he wants the country to return to normal as soon as possible.

The Elders also asked the government of Côte d’Ivoire to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit Mr and Mrs Gbagbo, and all other detainees, as soon as possible.

ABOUT THE ELDERS

The Elders is an independent group of global leaders brought together by Nelson Mandela in 2007, who work together for peace and human rights.

The Elders are Martti Ahtisaari, Kofi Annan, Ela Bhatt, Lakhdar Brahimi, Gro Brundtland, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Jimmy Carter, Graça Machel, Mary Robinson and Desmond Tutu (Chair). Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi are honorary Elders.

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