

The Elders: The success or failure of Rio+20 will be a defining moment for today's youth

"We simply can't afford to wait another twenty years to put our planet on a more sustainable path"
Gro Harlem Brundtland

Rio de Janeiro, 18 June 2012

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Elders called on world leaders today to deliver concrete outcomes at Rio+20, stressing that the future of the world's 3.5 billion young people should be at the forefront of their concerns.

Three members of The Elders, **Gro Harlem Brundtland**, former Prime Minister of Norway, **Fernando Henrique Cardoso**, former President of Brazil, and **Mary Robinson**, former President of Ireland, were joined in Rio by four young activists: Pedro Telles from Brazil, Marvin Nala from China, Esther Agbarakwe from Nigeria and Sara Svensson from Sweden. For the past eight weeks they have been participating in [Elders+Youngers](#), an open dialogue on the planet's economic, social and environmental future.

Both the Elders and the 'Youngers' emphasised that the potential success – or failure – of Rio+20 will be a defining moment for today's youth, and will also determine the aspirations and prospects of future generations.

The Elders called on world leaders to step up their efforts to achieve concrete outcomes at Rio+20 and ensure the full implementation of past agreements with no backsliding. They emphasised the importance of protecting the principle of "common but differentiated responsibility", as articulated in Rio in 1992.

Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway and member of the UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Global Sustainability, said:

"Despite widespread scepticism, we firmly believe there is still time to make Rio+20 count for future generations. We simply can't afford to wait another twenty years to put our planet on a more sustainable path.

"First, we need a clear agreement on a path to creating new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will help galvanise efforts to grow economies in ways that tackle poverty and inequality and protect our environment. Following the example of the Millennium Development Goals, the SDGs can become a powerful tool to measure progress and hold leaders accountable.

"Second, women must be put at the centre of sustainable development. It is a fact that countries that empower women are healthier, more prosperous and more peaceful. If we are to succeed in building a

sustainable future, women should be allowed to realise their full potential in economic, political and social life.

“Third, Rio+20 must promote access to cleaner, more efficient energy sources for all. This is key to protecting the environment, but will also have a positive impact on health, education and economic opportunities.”

Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said:

“At the first Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, world leaders recognised that, in a world of finite resources, economic growth had to go hand in hand with social justice and protecting the environment.

“Twenty years later, the implementation of this integrated approach is far too slow and sustainable development is yet to become a reality. Furthermore, climate change and the global financial crisis have only increased the burden on millions of the poorest people on the planet.

“Rio+20 is a once-in-a generation opportunity to implement a rights-based, human-centred approach to sustainable development. We can’t afford to miss it.”

Speaking at a press conference with the four young activists from Brazil, China, Nigeria and Sweden, the Elders also called on today’s leaders to think long term and take on board the aspirations of young people.

Fernando Henrique Cardoso, former President of Brazil, said:

“There are 3.5 billion people under the age of 30 in the world today – half the global population. It is their future that is at stake in Rio, not ours.

“Today’s young people are impatient for change. They are more aware and have a broader worldview than generations before them. New technologies connect them to people everywhere and have created new spaces for them to find power in numbers, online and in public squares.

“Global recognition of the concept of sustainable development is only as old as their generation. Today’s youth can realise it, but Rio+20 must help them urgently. They can build on our achievements – if only we achieve more.”

MEDIA INQUIRIES

Contact: media@theElders.org

- [WATCH NEW VIDEO](#) – Elders+Youngers: “It’s our future, it’s our time”
 - [FOLLOW THE ELDERS+YOUNGERS LIVE BLOG](#)
 - [READ THE ELDERS OP-ED](#) – “Rio+20’s opportunity will be squandered without courage and vision”, by Gro Harlem Brundtland and Fernando Henrique Cardoso
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The four 'Youngers' are:

- [Esther Agbarakwe](#), 27, from Nigeria, who currently works with Population Action International in Washington DC as an Atlas Corps International Advocacy Fellow
 - [Marvin Nala](#), 23, an environmental advocate from China who founded the Big Appetite volunteer network and is currently an intern at UNDP China and the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy
 - [Sara Svensson](#), 27, environmental activist and advocate from Sweden, who is currently interning with UNEP in Nairobi
 - [Pedro Telles](#), 24, a socio-environmentalist based in São Paulo, Brazil, who currently works with the Vitae Civilis Institute
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About Elders+Youngers

[Elders+Youngers](#) is an open online dialogue on sustainable development between four Elders – Gro Harlem Brundtland, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Mary Robinson and Desmond Tutu – and four 'Youngers' – Esther from Nigeria, Marvin from China, Pedro from Brazil and Sara from Sweden.

People, profit and the environment – can we balance them all? Is sustainable development a luxury we cannot afford? Are girls better at saving the planet than boys? After all the speeches, how do we make governments deliver?

Over the past eight weeks, the Elders and the leaders of tomorrow have been discussing new ways of thinking on the most urgent issues facing our world today – and exploring practical paths of action to tackle them. The discussions are relayed in Chinese on [Sina Weibo](#), China's biggest social networking site with over 300 million users, and in Portuguese on 'Younger' Pedro Telles' [blog](#).

[Elders+Youngers](#) is an initiative supported by [TckTckTck](#) – the public campaign of the Global Campaign for Climate Action (GCCA), a worldwide alliance of more than 300 non-profit organisations.

About The Elders

The Elders are independent leaders using their collective experience and influence for peace, justice and human rights worldwide. The group was founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007.

The Elders are [Martti Ahtisaari](#), [Ela Bhatt](#), [Lakhdar Brahimi](#), [Gro Harlem Brundtland](#), [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#), [Jimmy Carter](#), [Graça Machel](#), [Mary Robinson](#) and [Desmond Tutu](#) (Chair). [Nelson Mandela](#) is an honorary Elder.

For more information about The Elders, please visit: www.theElders.org

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