

The Elders honour the memory of their Founder, Nelson Mandela

“Nelson Mandela stands as an inspiration to us all” – Kofi Annan

“He was a moral colossus, a global icon of forgiveness and reconciliation” – Desmond Tutu

5 December 2013

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Nelson Mandela and the Elders in Johannesburg in 2010. (L-R: Graça Machel, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Desmond Tutu, Jimmy Carter, Mary Robinson, Kofi Annan, Nelson Mandela, Gro Harlem Brundtland, Martti Ahtisaari, Ela Bhatt, Lakhdar Brahimi) Credit: The Elders/Jeff Moore

The Elders are deeply saddened by the death of their founder, Nelson Mandela. They join millions of people around the world who were inspired by his courage and touched by his compassion. All will mourn his passing.

Mandela – or Madiba as he is known in South Africa – called the Elders together in 2007, urging them to be bold, independent and to speak the truth. He told them to be a robust force for good, and to work in the interests of peace for all humanity.

The Elders have taken Madiba’s words as their mission and endeavour to honour his memory in their work. On this sad day they give their love and condolences to his wife Graça Machel, who is also a member of The Elders, and all the Mandela family.

Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary-General, Chair of The Elders, said:

“The world has lost a visionary leader, a courageous voice for justice, and a clear moral compass. By showing us that the path to freedom and human dignity lies in love, wisdom and compassion for one another, Nelson Mandela stands as an inspiration to us all.

“I shall never forget his expansive smile and gentle demeanour, nor his steely determination and wonderful sense of humour. I have lost a dear friend. While I mourn the loss of one of Africa’s most distinguished leaders, Madiba’s legacy beckons us to follow his example to strive for human rights, reconciliation and justice for all.”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, former Chair of The Elders, said:

“God was so good to us in South Africa by giving us Nelson Mandela to be our President at a crucial moment in our history. He inspired us to walk the path of forgiveness and reconciliation and so South Africa did not go up in flames. Thank you God, for this wonderful gift who became a moral colossus, a global icon of forgiveness and reconciliation. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.”

Martti Ahtisaari, former President of Finland, said:

“The most impressive man of my generation has passed away. No one has influenced my life more than President Nelson Mandela. Anyone supporting the just struggle for democratic change in Southern Africa cannot have been untouched by President Mandela’s life.

“When I first met President Mandela, I was deeply impressed. He was a man who had been in prison for 27 years, but after his release did not want to waste his life by feeling bitter about his captors, however justified that would have been.

“Instead he used his enormous influence to build a new South Africa for all her citizens. He taught us what responsible leadership means. His presence was always uplifting. We owe it to him that we will try to follow his example. Today I join the millions who miss him and extend my deepest condolences to his wife and family.”

Ela Bhatt, founder of India’s Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), said:

“The world has lost a great leader. Madiba showed the people of the world that great nations are built with moral courage and collective strength, with justice and equal opportunity, with truth and reconciliation, with love and forgiveness, with vision and wisdom. He was indeed the Gandhi of South Africa. His spirit lives on in the people of South Africa and in the hearts of all who loved him.

“His face is difficult to forget, so kind and so caring. It was his message of Ubuntu that drew me to him and to the Elders. We can do no better than honour his memory by bringing the spirit of Ubuntu to every corner of the world.

“My deepest condolences to Graça and Madiba’s family for their great loss.”

Lakhdar Brahimi, former Foreign Minister of Algeria, said:

“Men and women everywhere feel they have lost someone very close to them, a man they loved deeply and respected and admired profoundly.

“It was such a privilege to have known him, to have listened to him a number of times, to have participated, however modestly, in his gigantic achievement: the end of apartheid and the restoration of lasting peace and reconciliation in South Africa.”

Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway, Deputy Chair of The Elders, said:

“Six years after his release from prison, I had the great honour as Norway’s Prime Minister, to be the first foreign guest to visit Robben Island with Nelson Mandela and see the tiny cell in which he spent 18 of his

27 years in jail. It was an incredibly moving and unforgettable experience. He embodied the greatness of human dignity and restraint under terrible pressure.

“These personal, unforgettable moments with Madiba fill my heart with joy and gratitude on this very sad and deeply emotional day. No one else in our lifetime has made such a lasting mark on our minds and attitudes, all across the world, as Nelson Mandela.”

Fernando Henrique Cardoso, former President of Brazil, said:

“The whole world laments the loss of Nelson Mandela. For us Brazilians and for me personally, his action went beyond the struggle for a free South Africa. It illustrated the struggle to liberate human beings from the shackles both of racism and of revenge.

“On the memory of the beholder – be it a person or a multitude – behind each of his actions loomed the story of a fighter who did not shy away from the challenges of the armed struggle, of a lawyer standing with the humiliated and the offended, of the prisoner who joined his comrades in the hard work of breaking stones, of the political leader that, prior to liberation, refused to compromise but once free called for reconciliation without lies.

“Mandela’s greatness comes from his capacity to show his people and all of us the value of truthfulness, fraternity and the on-going struggle for equality, all this enhanced by his overwhelming simplicity.

“Let us grieve his passing away; let us safeguard his legacy.”

Jimmy Carter, former US President, said:

“I am deeply saddened by the death of Nelson Mandela. The people of South Africa and human rights advocates around the world have lost a great leader. His passion for freedom and justice created new hope for generations of oppressed people worldwide, and because of him, South Africa is today one of the world’s leading democracies.

“I was gratified to be able to work with him through The Elders to encourage resolution of conflicts and advance social justice and human rights in many nations. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family at this difficult time.”

Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, said:

“Nelson Mandela was a much loved citizen of the world. His death leaves us bereft – it is felt by all of us as a personal loss. I want to extend my love and deepest condolences to all his family and especially his wife, our fellow Elder, Graça Machel.

“There are so many ways that we will remember Nelson Mandela. His determination and courage in fighting for justice for his people, his moral authority, not least in his forgiveness of his former guards, and his valuing of diversity in all aspects of the new South Africa. From all who ever had contact with him, he commanded enormous respect.

“In old age he became frailer, but his familiar voice was as strong as ever when he wanted to emphasise an issue of injustice, or remind us to listen to those on the margins, and those who suffer.

“It was an honour, and also very humbling, to be invited by Mandela to join The Elders. We will strive to uphold the values of justice, of listening, and of mutual respect for others that he embodied.”

Nelson Mandela and The Elders

Nelson Mandela [founded The Elders](#) in Johannesburg on his 89th birthday, 18 July 2007, after the idea was brought to him by the entrepreneur [Richard Branson](#) and the musician [Peter Gabriel](#). With the help of [Graça Machel](#) and [Desmond Tutu](#), he brought together ten ‘Elders’ – independent, progressive leaders committed to peace, justice and human rights – to work together on global problems including

peace-building and reconciliation in war-affected regions, sustainable development and equality for girls and women.

The Elders are [Martti Ahtisaari](#), [Kofi Annan](#) (Chair), [Ela Bhatt](#), [Lakhdar Brahimi](#), [Gro Harlem Brundtland](#) (Deputy Chair), [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#), [Jimmy Carter](#), [Hina Jilani](#), [Graça Machel](#), [Mary Robinson](#) and [Ernesto Zedillo](#). [Desmond Tutu](#) is an Honorary Elder.

At the group's launch in 2007, [Nelson Mandela called on The Elders](#) to act as "a fiercely independent and robust force for good, tackling complex and intractable issues – especially those that are not popular."

After founding The Elders, Nelson Mandela did not play an active role, but he remained an Honorary Elder and the inspiration for The Elders' work. In May 2010, the Elders [reunited with Nelson Mandela](#) during one of the group's biannual meetings, in Johannesburg. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, then Chair of The Elders, said: "It gives us such a strong sense of purpose and determination to sit with dear Madiba who brought us all together."

Media resources

- **VIDEO** – Nelson Mandela's speech at the launch of The Elders (2007): <http://theelders.org/article/nelson-mandela-introduces-elders-johannesburg-18-july-2007>
- **TRANSCRIPT** – Nelson Mandela's speech at the launch of The Elders (2007): <http://theelders.org/article/nelson-mandelas-speech-launch-elders>

Media inquiries

Sylvain Biville | Media Manager, The Elders | T +44 7547 736 371 | media@theElders.org

Jennifer Woodside | Communications Director, The Elders | T +44 7880 230 977 | media@theElders.org

Sign up to [receive The Elders' press releases](#)

Find out more

For biographies of the Elders, blogs, photos, videos and more information about their work please go to theElders.org.

Follow The Elders on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#) and [YouTube](#).