

Mary Robinson

First woman President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; a passionate, forceful advocate for gender equality, women's participation in peace-building and human dignity.

- President of Ireland 1990-1997
- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 1997-2002
- Institutional reformer: brought the human rights agenda into the core of United Nations activities

"Part of the wisdom of the Elders is to remind the world that we actually have universal values that are accepted by every government in the world and yet they are not being implemented."

Work with The Elders

Mary Robinson has been a member of The Elders since the group was founded in 2007 and makes it a priority to bring the concerns of ordinary people to the global stage.

She joined both Elders' delegations to the [Middle East](#) to encourage peace efforts and support Israelis and Palestinians working for peaceful coexistence; visited the [Korean Peninsula](#) to help ease tensions between North and South Korea and learn more about North Korea's chronic food crisis; travelled to [Côte d'Ivoire](#) to emphasise the importance of reconciliation following widespread civil conflict in early 2011; and visited South Sudan in July 2012, where the Elders met refugees from recent fighting and urged a return to dialogue between Sudan and South Sudan.

A tireless champion of women's equality, she also travelled to Ethiopia in June 2011 with her fellow Elders to convene an international meeting of experts and activists working to end [child marriage](#), which was followed by a visit to India in February 2012 to support youth activists tackling early marriage in their own communities.

Mrs Robinson also participated in the [Elders+Youngers](#) project, an intergenerational dialogue on sustainable development between four Elders and four young change-makers during the Rio+20 summit in June 2012.

First woman President of Ireland

Mary Robinson was elected Irish President in 1990 and served for seven years as a principled and transformative leader who continued to fight for equality and women's rights throughout her time in office. A firm believer in dialogue and reconciliation, she broke taboos by being the first Irish head of state to make official visits to Britain, as well as regularly visiting Northern Ireland.

She was the first head of state to visit Somalia following the crisis there in 1992, and brought global media attention to the suffering of Rwandans as the first Head of State to visit the country just after the 1994 genocide.

Human rights champion

As UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (1997-2002), Mary Robinson integrated human rights into the United Nations system and became renowned as an outspoken voice dedicated to investigating and exposing human rights abuses across the world.

Mary Robinson founded [Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative](#), which aimed to put human rights standards at the heart of global governance and to ensure that the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable are addressed on the global stage.

As an academic, legislator and barrister, Mary Robinson has always sought to use law as an instrument for social change, arguing landmark cases before the European Court of Human Rights as well as in the Irish courts and the European Court in Luxembourg. A committed European, she also served on expert European Community and Irish parliamentary committees. In 1988 Mary Robinson and her husband founded the Irish Centre for European Law at Trinity College, the University of Dublin. Ten years later she was elected Chancellor of the University.

Tackling global issues

Currently based in Dublin, Mary Robinson heads the [Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice](#), a centre for education and advocacy on sustainable and people-centred development in the world's poorest communities.

She co-founded the Council of Women World Leaders, a network that mobilises women leaders at the highest levels to promote democracy and gender equality. She is a member of the Club of Madrid, a group of global leaders working on governance and conflict issues. She is also:

- Honorary President of Oxfam International
- Former President of the International Commission of Jurists
- Board Member of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation

- Board Member of the European Climate Foundation