

Elders warn of consequences of “one-state reality” in Israel and Palestine

22 JUNE 2023

TEL AVIV

MEDIA RELEASE: The Chair and Deputy Chair of The Elders today warned that a ‘one-state reality’ is now rapidly extinguishing the prospect of a two-state solution foreseen in the 1993 Oslo Accords to bring peace and security to both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples.

The Government of Israel’s intent to exercise sovereignty over all the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea undermines the democratic ideals of the Israeli state, denies the Palestinian people their right to self-determination, and risks an uncontrollable explosion of violence on both sides.

Mary Robinson, Chair of The Elders, former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner of Human Rights, and Ban Ki-moon, Deputy Chair of The Elders and former UN Secretary-General, spoke out at the conclusion of a three-day visit to Israel and Palestine. They met a range of Israeli and Palestinian political leaders and civil society organisations, foreign diplomats, and former members of the Israeli military and diplomatic service.

They also saw for themselves some of the facts on the ground, and heard from Israeli, Palestinian and international human rights organisations about the ever-growing evidence that the situation meets the international legal definition of apartheid: the expansion and entrenchment of illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the establishment of dual legal regimes and separation infrastructure in the occupied territories, and the institutionalised discrimination and abuses perpetrated against Palestinians.

They heard no detailed rebuttal of the evidence of apartheid. On the contrary, the declarations and policies of the current Israeli Government – whose Coalition Guidelines state that “the Jewish people have an exclusive and inalienable right to all parts of the Land of Israel” – clearly show an intent to pursue permanent annexation rather than temporary occupation, based on Jewish supremacy. Measures include the transfer of administrative powers over the occupied West Bank from military to civilian authorities, accelerating the approval processes for building settlements, and constructing new infrastructure that would render a future Palestinian state unviable.

Such a situation has profound implications for Israel’s proud status as a democracy, the two Elders warned. It also undermines the credibility of the international community as the guarantor of a rules-based global order. If the Israeli Government’s current trajectory is not reversed, countries who care about the international rule of law should consider serious enforceable measures to increase pressure on the Israeli Government to meet its international obligations.

The two Elders also noted with alarm the highest level of violence since the end of the second intifada in 2005. They condemned the killings in the past week of Palestinian civilians by Israeli security forces in Jenin, of Israeli settlers by Hamas in the West Bank, and of a Palestinian civilian by Israeli settlers. The Palestinian leadership has a responsibility to do all it can to prevent the terror attacks that cause very real fears among Israelis. The two Elders warned such incidents will only escalate and multiply unless the root causes of the conflict are addressed.

Mary Robinson, Chair of The Elders and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said:

"I am profoundly shocked by the changes I have seen on my first visit to this region for several years. The policies of successive Israeli governments have entrenched the oppression of Palestinians, and also jeopardise the security and democracy Israelis have fought so hard for. Meanwhile the Palestinian people have no confidence in their own leadership; elections are long overdue and the democratic vacuum and shrinking civic space allows extremism and violence to flourish. All parties, including the international community, must act urgently to avert a calamitous descent into uncontrollable violence."

Mary Robinson and Ban Ki-moon expressed solidarity with Israelis protesting against their government's proposed plans to weaken judicial independence, and encouraged protesters to confront the corrosive impact of the 56-year occupation on Israeli democracy.

They also challenged the international community to address double standards on violations of international law. The indictment of Russian President Vladimir Putin by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes in Ukraine stands in stark contrast to the lack of progress on the ICC's investigation into alleged crimes committed in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Together with the case before the International Court of Justice and the work of the UN Commission of Inquiry, the ICC case is a litmus test for the credibility of an international system which should hold to account all those who break international law.

Ban Ki-moon, Deputy Chair of The Elders and former UN Secretary-General, said:

"I leave Israel and Palestine with a heavy heart. I have seen and heard compelling evidence of a one-state reality, with systemic impunity for violators of international law and human rights. There is a lack of political vision and leadership in Israel and Palestine and among Israel's allies, who continue to revert to a short-term approach. The people of Israel and Palestine, and the world, deserve better. And they deserve it now, before it is too late."

ENDS

Media enquiries

William French, Head of Communications
T: +44 7795 693903
media@theElders.org

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

About The Elders

The Elders are independent global leaders working for peace, justice, human rights and a sustainable planet. The group was founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007.

The Elders are [Ban Ki-moon \(Deputy Chair\)](#), [Gro Harlem Brundtland](#), [Elbegdorj Tsakhia](#), [Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein](#), [Hina Jilani](#), [Ellen Johnson Sirleaf](#), [Ricardo Lagos](#), [Graça Machel \(Deputy Chair\)](#), [Juan Manuel Santos](#), [Mary Robinson \(Chair\)](#) and [Ernesto Zedillo](#).

[Martti Ahtisaari](#), [Lakhdar Brahimi](#), [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#), and [Jimmy Carter](#) are Elders Emeritus.

[Desmond Tutu](#) (1931-2021) and [Kofi Annan](#) (1938-2018) were founding members of The Elders and served as Chairs from 2007 to 2013 and 2013 to 2018 respectively. [Ela Bhatt](#) (1933 - 2022) was a founding member of The Elders until 2016.

Find out more

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

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