

## **We stand with those crying out for freedom**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

We are deeply concerned by the dramatic events unfolding across North Africa and many parts of the Middle East. As Elders, we stand with all those crying out for freedom and basic rights. The universal yearning of people to be free, to have their voices heard and to participate in the decisions that affect their lives and communities cannot be extinguished.

As we learned in our conversations with young people during our visit to the region late last year, there is understandable frustration at the persistent inequality and lack of jobs and opportunity in their societies. We commend those courageous youths and ordinary citizens from all walks of life who have demonstrated to the world their desire to better their societies and enlarge the space for popular participation.

We are, therefore, extremely dismayed by the tragic loss of life that has occurred in recent days, and the repressive tactics to which some authorities have resorted in suppressing the protests. We call upon all those concerned – governments, security services, political parties and concerned citizens – to avoid the use of violence and show the utmost respect for the sanctity of human life and for the right of people to campaign for change and reform in their own societies.

To avoid chaos and extremism, the pursuit of political change must always be managed with care. However, concern for national stability, however justified or understandable, cannot be used to repress people's right to pursue democratic legitimacy and equal opportunities for all. Infringement of basic rights, including against those brave citizens who monitor the observance of human rights and those who seek to disseminate information to others through all forms of communication and media, should be condemned.

Over the coming period, we shall continue to follow closely the course of events in the region. Only those governments that can truly command the support of their people, in societies that respect freedom of association and expression, will ultimately prosper.

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## ABOUT THE ELDERS

The Elders are an independent group of global leaders, brought together by Nelson Mandela in 2007, who offer their collective influence and experience to support peace- building, help address major causes of human suffering and promote the shared interests of humanity.

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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For biographies of the Elders, blogs, photos, videos and more information about their work please go to [www.theElders.org](http://www.theElders.org)

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