

The Elders to focus on easing inter-Korean tensions

Jimmy Carter, Martti Ahtisaari, Gro Brundtland and Mary Robinson visit Beijing, Pyongyang and Seoul 24-29 April

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Members of The Elders currently in Beijing at the start of a six-day visit to China and the Korean Peninsula, hope that their efforts will contribute to an easing of the current tensions between North and South Korea. The Elders will also discuss how to ameliorate reported food shortages in the DPRK that may affect millions of people.

Led by former US President Jimmy Carter who has had a long association with Korean affairs, the delegation includes three fellow Elders: former President of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari, former Prime Minister of Norway, Dr Gro Brundtland, and former President of Ireland, Mrs Mary Robinson.

The delegation will begin their regional visit in Beijing on 24 April and travel to Pyongyang (26-28 April) and Seoul (28-29 April). In all three locations they will meet senior officials, members of civil society, academic experts and foreign diplomats.

President Jimmy Carter said: "I am delighted to be making this visit to the region as a member of The Elders. This is an important new initiative for us as a group. At a time when official dialogue with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea appears to be at a standstill, we aim to see how we may be of assistance in reducing tensions and help the parties address key issues including denuclearisation."

President Martti Ahtisaari, also an experienced conflict mediator, said: "In my experience, there is a solution to every problem, but achieving agreement requires meaningful dialogue between the relevant parties. Getting talks started is a matter of political will and trust. Clearly there is a great level of mistrust and suspicion between North and South Korea. But the stakes are too high to allow this stand-off to continue."

Dr Gro Brundtland, a physician by training and former Director-General of the UN's World Health Organisation, added: "We are very concerned about the acute shortage of food reported by the government of North Korea and humanitarian agencies. Any immediate humanitarian needs must be met – but we also want to discuss longer-term food security and health issues that are so important to economic development."

Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said: “All governments have an obligation to prioritise the wellbeing of their own people, especially when resources are scarce. Ensuring there is ‘human security,’ including access to adequate food, is a basic right of all peoples and a requirement on the part of their governments. This is not a matter of ideology. It is about the shared humanity of us all.”

ABOUT THE ELDERS

The Elders is an independent group of eminent global leaders, founded by Nelson Mandela, who work together to support peace-building and human rights. Members of The Elders no longer hold public office and are independent of any government.

Nelson Mandela announced the formation of The Elders in Johannesburg, South Africa in July 2007 on his 89th birthday. Today he continues to inspire the work of The Elders, but has retired from public life and no longer takes an active role in Elders’ initiatives.

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.

In their peace-building work the Elders have identified the following as priority areas: promoting peace and human rights in Burma/Myanmar and Sri Lanka, inter-communal dialogue in Cyprus, improving inter-Korean relations, Sudan’s referendum and implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, supporting a human rights-based approach to peace in the Middle East, and encouraging democratic progress in Zimbabwe. Gender equality and respect for universal human rights are core themes of all their activities.

Their work involves public and private consultation, engagement with the media and reaching decision-makers at the highest level. The Elders encourage the view that everyone can make a positive contribution in their community, much as they have done throughout their lives.

For more information please visit The Elders’ website: www.theElders.org

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