

Bold action is needed to make sustainable development a reality
Today's leaders must make binding decisions for the long term

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As the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability releases its [report](#) today, The Elders urge political, business and civil society leaders around the world to take bold actions to build a more equitable and sustainable world for us all.

The Elders warmly welcome the Panel's report and hope that it will help to generate momentum for a successful UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20) in Brazil in June 2012.

At the first landmark Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, world leaders committed themselves to promoting a new form of development that would not only be measured in terms of economic growth, but would also take into account social equity and the protection of the environment.

First coined by the Brundtland Commission in 1987, sustainable development is a visionary concept that holds the promise of a fairer world by uniting three pillars of development – the economy, humanity and the environment – in order to meet today's needs without compromising the needs of future generations.

"Twenty-five years after the Brundtland report, our political systems have failed to deliver the integrated action that is so urgently needed," said former UN Secretary-General **Kofi Annan**. *"As rightly pointed out by the Global Sustainability Panel, the vision of sustainable development is yet to become a reality."*

Meeting people's legitimate aspirations for decent jobs, prosperity, a clean and safe environment, affordable health care, education and sustainable energy supplies has never been more necessary. The gap between rich and poor is growing while unsustainable production and consumption patterns are imposing excessive demands on the planet's finite resources.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chair of The Elders, said: *"If decision-makers continue to focus mainly on economic growth to address the needs of humanity, rather than taking a range of factors into account in a more sustainable approach, they risk leaving future generations an even more polarised and dangerous world."*

"We now need to act much more forcefully," said **Gro Brundtland**, former Prime Minister of Norway and member of the UN Global Sustainability Panel. *"There is no*

alternative pathway ahead. For 20 years since the first Rio Earth Summit, these issues have been widely debated, with the acknowledgement that only an integrated approach that embraces intra- and inter-generational equity will secure a sustainable future for humankind.”

Ela Bhatt, founder of India’s Self Employed Women’s Association said: *“It is time to put behind us the outdated battle between economic development, social justice and environmental protection: far from being mutually exclusive, the three should be mutually reinforcing.”*

“Business as usual is no longer acceptable,” said former President of Brazil **Fernando Henrique Cardoso**. *“All of us, regardless of where in the world we live, have tough choices to make.”*

“In the name of political accountability, we as Elders encourage today’s leaders to make binding decisions for the long term, sharing the tough choices more fairly between current and future generations.”

The Elders also call on business leaders around the world to take a longer view. The corporate sector bears huge responsibility for today’s unsustainable path. Business should be a powerful driver for change and innovation, promoting sustainable lifestyles and developing new models of consumption and production, with governments and civil society holding them to account.

“Strengthening the participation of women at all levels of decision-making is crucial,” said **Mary Robinson**, former President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. *“A serious shift towards sustainable development requires gender equality and an end to persistent discrimination. The next major boost to global growth could well come from the full economic empowerment of women.”*

The Elders believe that every individual should take greater responsibility for individual choices and give support to leaders who are willing to take difficult and bold decisions.

As a starting point, The Elders support three proposals that are by no means exhaustive, but they hope will be endorsed by world leaders at the ‘Rio+20’ Conference on Sustainable Development:

- **“Sustainable Development Goals”**: The Millennium Development Goals have shown that setting worldwide benchmarks is an effective impetus for action, and helps to hold leaders to account. The SDGs would be a useful additional tool to measure progress towards achieving sustainable development.
- **“An Ombudsperson for Future Generations”**: In charge of promoting sustainable development, the Ombudsperson should have a mandate to assess the long-term impacts of public policies and corporate activities.
- **“A Sustainable Development Council”**: A high-level UN body would help to put sustainable development at the highest level of the global agenda.

The road to Rio +20 is an opportunity to finally put into practice an inclusive and equitable sustainable development agenda. The lives of our children and grandchildren will depend on it.

About The Elders

The Elders are independent global leaders working together for peace and human rights. The group was founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007.

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.

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

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