

## Rio+20 must rescue the future, Elders and ‘Youngers’ tell today’s leaders

- *“You must succeed where we have failed”* – Desmond Tutu
- *“We can’t put off action for another day”* – Gro Brundtland
- *“We have a doomsday scenario to avoid, and sustainable development is the only way to do it”* – Sara Svensson, 27, from Sweden

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

As 3.5 billion young people find themselves living in a world increasingly defined by soaring inequalities and an environment under critical strain, The Elders launch a [global debate](#) with young leaders to inspire the urgent change needed to build a more equitable and sustainable world, ahead of a major UN meeting in June.

Led by Gro Brundtland, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Mary Robinson and Desmond Tutu – along with four Youngers – the online debate is taking place in the weeks leading up to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June 2012.

People, profit and the environment – can we balance them all? Is sustainable development a luxury we cannot afford? Are girls better at saving the planet than boys? After all the speeches, how do we make governments deliver? The Elders and tomorrow’s leaders will discuss new ways of thinking on the most urgent issues facing our world today - and explore practical paths of action to tackle them.

The online debate – developed together with [TckTckTck](#) – is open to all, and aims to particularly engage young people worldwide on the crucial issues at stake in Rio.

It culminates in Elders and ‘Youngers’ meeting in Brazil to take stock of the dialogue and call on the leaders of today to deliver the much-needed actions that can help set us on a more sustainable path, one that protects both people and the planet.

The Youngers are four activists committed to putting sustainable development into practice in their own countries and globally. They are: [Esther Agbarakwe](#), 27, from Nigeria, [Marvin Nala](#), 23, from China, [Pedro Telles](#), 23, from Brazil and [Sara Svensson](#), 27, from Sweden.

**Archbishop Desmond Tutu**, Chair of The Elders, said:

*“These are four truly amazing young people. Why can’t our leaders be more like them?”*

*“This dialogue is about the bold action we need in Rio. Without that, we are done for. The Youngers must succeed where we have failed.”*

**Gro Brundtland**, former Prime Minister of Norway, member of the UN Secretary-General’s [Global Sustainability Panel](#), said:

*“This year we should be celebrating the Rio Earth Summit’s twentieth anniversary – and yet seven billion people now co-exist on our fragile planet, many of whom are dangerously short of food, water and basic economic security.*

*“Poverty, ecosystem degradation and climate change will define our era unless we all commit to urgently change the unsustainable path we are on at Rio+20. We can’t put off action for another day.”*

**Mary Robinson**, former President of Ireland, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said:

*“Today’s young people have a different perspective. They feel a greater sense of urgency about the issues. They care more about, and are better connected to, the global village.*

*“We Elders know only too well the tough decisions facing world leaders in Rio. It’s vital that they listen to what Elders and Youngers have to say.”*

**Fernando Henrique Cardoso**, former President of Brazil, said:

*“For better or for worse, and in light of its growth and its environmental challenges, the fate of Brazil will be strongly linked to this moment in humanity’s history – environmentally, economically and socially. It’s fitting we should be meeting here in June.*

*“I look forward to welcoming the Youngers on this occasion. I hope their presence in Rio is a moment they will come to be proud of.”*

The Youngers have an opportunity to challenge the Elders’ assumptions on the biggest issues facing our planet, and speak for a generation whose long-term fate hinges on bold and immediate action, in the context of surging youth unemployment in many parts of the world, and amid a generalised crisis of faith in policies promoting the sole pursuit of economic growth.

[Esther Agbarakwe](#), 27, from Nigeria, who currently works with [Population Action International](#) in Washington DC as an Atlas Corps International Advocacy Fellow, said:

*“I am passionate about Africa’s development, especially when it relates to women’s health and empowerment. This includes women’s ability to choose when, and how many children to have, as well as their ability to adapt to the changing climate they face each day.*”

*“I am equally aware that we have a long way to go to meet these challenges, but I believe that when young people know the urgency of the crisis, they will act.”*

[Marvin Nala](#), 23, an environmental advocate from China who founded the [Big Appetite](#) volunteer network and is currently undertaking an internship at [UNDP China](#) and the [Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy](#), said:

*“I believe in the power of each individual, no matter the political or economic system they live in. Chinese society is in transition, and I am deeply motivated to see so many young people around me becoming activists. They are a real force for good, online and offline, that we must build on.”*

[Sara Svensson](#), 27, a non-violent environmental activist and advocate from Sweden, who is currently interning with [UNEP](#) in Nairobi, said:

*“We have a doomsday scenario to avoid – and sustainable development is the only way to go about this. It is an opportunity to redefine our common values and bring about the kind of world that most people everywhere want.”*

[Pedro Telles](#), 23, a socio-environmentalist based in São Paulo, Brazil, who currently works with the [Vitae Civilis Institute](#), said:

*“I have chosen to dedicate my life to sustainable development. My heart and mind tell me there is not much sense focusing my energy in anything else.*”

*“Rio+20 comes as a very important moment of convergence in our history, exposing the many challenges we face worldwide, but also creating big opportunities for us to stand up for a fair, peaceful and sustainable world.”*

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## **About Elders+Youngers**

[WATCH](#) new video: What kind of world do we want for our great-great-grandchildren?

[READ](#): Elders+Youngers debates

The Youngers are available for interview – please contact [Sylvain Biville](#) for any inquiries.

'Elders+Youngers' is an initiative supported by [TckTckTck](#) – the public campaign of the Global Campaign for Climate Action (GCCA), a worldwide alliance of more than 300 non-profit organisations.

An 'Elders+Youngers' panel will take place during the UN Conference on Sustainable Development on 19 June 2012, at [Rio+Social](#) – an event to explore the new role of social media and technology in sustainable development.

In January 2012, The Elders urged world leaders to put an end to 'business as usual' at Rio+20 and to deliver on their commitment to a more equitable, sustainable world. For more information, please refer to [this statement](#).

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### **About The Elders**

The Elders are independent leaders using their collective experience and influence for peace, justice and human rights worldwide. The group was founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007.

The Elders are [Martti Ahtisaari](#), [Ela Bhatt](#), [Lakhdar Brahimi](#), [Gro Brundtland](#), [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#), [Jimmy Carter](#), [Graça Machel](#), [Mary Robinson](#) and [Desmond Tutu](#) (Chair).

[Nelson Mandela](#) is an honorary Elder.

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

Follow The Elders on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

### **Media inquiries**

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