

The Elders: Rio+20 is not the response we need to safeguard people and the planet

“A failure of leadership” – Mary Robinson

“Omission of reproductive rights is a step backwards” – Gro Harlem Brundtland

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Today The Elders said that the declaration of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) is not the response we need to safeguard people and the planet.

Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway and Chair of the UN commission that brought the concept of sustainable development to global attention 25 years ago, said:

“The Rio+20 declaration does not do enough to set humanity on a sustainable path, decades after it was agreed that this is essential for both people and the planet. I understand the frustration in Rio today.

“We can no longer assume that our collective actions will not trigger tipping points, as environmental thresholds are breached, risking irreversible damage to both ecosystems and human communities. These are the facts – but they have been lost in the final document.

“Also regrettable is the omission of reproductive rights – which is a step backwards from previous agreements. However – with this imperfect text, we have to move forward. There is no alternative. The most important message as we leave Rio is that the collective task of making the three pillars of sustainable development a reality must continue – and we don’t have any time to lose.”

In assessing the Rio+20 declaration, The Elders welcome provisions for the drafting of global Sustainable Development Goals, although they are concerned that the process for doing so is unclear.

The Elders also welcome commitments made on women’s equality and empowerment, but object to the omission of specific language on reproductive rights from both the Rio+20 declaration, and the ‘Call to Action’ signed today at the UN Women “Summit of Women World Leaders” at Rio+20.

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

“This is a ‘once in a generation’ moment when the world needs vision, commitment and above all, leadership. Sadly, the current document is a failure of leadership. It sets some processes in train and we will have to work with them, but we should also expect and encourage new constituencies to emerge, demanding new thinking and change from the grassroots to the top.

“I had also hoped for greater progress on creating institutions to hold governments accountable – such as a Sustainable Development Council – or a new mechanism to represent the interests of young people and future generations at the UN.

“The challenge now is to mobilise a wider community of civil society, trade unions, business and other major groups represented at the UN to create the pressure needed for a new paradigm of sustainable development.”

Fernando Henrique Cardoso, former President of Brazil, said:

“I am concerned that the final declaration does not give the same weight to environmental protection as it does to human development and growth. This old division between environment and development is not the way we are going to solve the problems that we are creating for our grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

“We have to accept that the solutions to poverty and inequality lie in sustainable growth, not growth at all costs. The challenge is to move our governments and institutions towards this kind of thinking.

“What is even more important than the Rio+20 Declaration is the mobilisation of people around this issue. Let us continue to demand more from our governments, and work to get effective international mechanisms to monitor progress on sustainability. Civil society must keep pushing for these changes – governments need it.”

Elders+Youngers

The Elders paid special tribute to the many thousands of young people who have come to Rio, held activities in their own countries, or joined online debates and actions around Rio+20. Among them were the four ‘Youngers’, who have taken part in an intense online and in-person debate with The Elders in the eight weeks leading up to Rio+20.

Esther Agbarakwe from Nigeria, Marvin Nala from China, Sara Svensson from Sweden and Pedro Telles from Brazil have questioned, challenged and joined forces with the Elders in seeking political and practical pathways to the future we want.

And as Fernando Henrique Cardoso told them: *“We have the past, you have the future.”*

MEDIA INQUIRIES

Contact: media@theElders.org

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About Elders+Youngers

[Elders+Youngers](#) is an open online dialogue on sustainable development between four Elders – Gro Harlem Brundtland, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Mary Robinson and Desmond Tutu – and four Youngers – Esther from Nigeria, Marvin from China, Pedro from Brazil and Sara from Sweden.

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?

Over the past eight weeks, the Elders and the leaders of tomorrow have been discussing new ways of thinking on the most urgent issues facing our world today – and exploring practical paths of action to tackle them. The discussions are relayed in Chinese on [Sina Weibo](#), China's biggest social networking site with over 300 million users, and in Portuguese on Younger Pedro Telles' [blog](#).

[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.

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 Harlem Brundtland](#), [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#), [Jimmy Carter](#), [Graça Machel](#), [Mary Robinson](#) and [Desmond Tutu](#) (Chair). [Nelson Mandela](#) is an honorary Elder.

For more information about The Elders, please visit: www.theElders.org.

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