

Syria: The Elders express “deep moral outrage” at collective failure to halt carnage

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The Elders urge all parties in Syria, and all those in the international community who can influence the outcome of the crisis, to work together to end the bloodshed and move the country away from the abyss.

They stress that any permanent ceasefire and further long-term solution must be Syrian-led and -owned to be viable, but that the international community cannot abandon the Syrian people to their fate while atrocities are committed and prospects for peace are in deadlock. They urge the international community to take a unified stance to help bring about an end to the suffering of the Syrian people.

The Elders also call on all parties to stand by the international laws safeguarding the protection of civilians in times of conflict, as enshrined in international humanitarian and human rights conventions. They stress that UN bodies and other independent agencies must be given full access to monitor human rights violations, provide humanitarian assistance and protect the vulnerable.

Following the announcement last week that he would not continue his mission when his mandate expires at the end of August, The Elders [paid tribute](#) to Kofi Annan’s courageous efforts as Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on the Syrian crisis. They further call on all concerned parties to follow the recommendations contained in his statement of resignation.

The toll of casualties in Syria continues to rise. According to conservative estimates, at least 17,000 people have been killed and tens of thousands of others have been injured over the past 17 months, many of them women and children. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 1 million people have been internally displaced and over 120,000 have fled the country.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chair of The Elders, said:

“Bashar al-Assad bears primary responsibility for protecting the people, but there has also been a collective failure to halt Syria’s suffering. My fellow Elders and I are witnessing the unfolding carnage with the utmost sadness and a deep sense of moral outrage.

“This feeling is made worse by the international deadlock, which seems so cynical and uncaring. As Kofi’s resignation statement made clear, the blaming and finger-pointing at the highest levels of the international community are unconscionable distractions from the bloodshed, death and destruction unfolding each day in Syria.

“We pray his wise advice will be heeded, and that the international community will work together to help bring about an end to this tragic situation as soon as possible.”

Martti Ahtisaari, former President of Finland, said:

“We need the international community to show leadership, rise above vested interests and regional alliances and find genuine compromise in the greater interests of the Syrian people.

“The UN General Assembly resolution on Syria, adopted with overwhelming support on 3 August, provides a baseline of agreement on what needs to happen now. But it is only a starting point for the work that, crucially, must urgently follow in the UN Security Council.”

Ela Bhatt, founder of India’s Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), said:

“Violence inevitably breeds more violence, as people take up arms to defend or avenge their loved ones. This is precisely what we are witnessing today. This vicious circle has to be broken before Syrian society becomes polarised beyond repair.

“We know that longstanding peace can only be achieved by those who address their differences through dialogue. It will take time, and cannot begin until there is a permanent ceasefire.”

Lakhdar Brahimi, former Foreign Minister of Algeria, said:

“Syrians must come together as a nation in the quest for a new formula. This is the only way to ensure that all Syrians can live together peacefully, in a society not based on fear of reprisal, but on tolerance. In the meantime, the UN Security Council and regional states must unite to ensure that a political transition can take place as soon as possible.

“Millions of Syrians are clamouring for peace. World leaders cannot remain divided any longer, over and above their cries.”

Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway, said:

“The humanitarian dimension of this crisis has worrying implications for the whole region.

“Jordan and Lebanon are facing a high influx of refugees from Syria, and we are highly concerned by reports that Lebanon has been turning fleeing Syrians away at the border, when they face incarceration, if not worse, back at home.

“There have also been reports of longstanding Palestinian refugees living in Syria who have also had to flee and have been refused entry into Jordan, unlike Syrians. Those in need should be treated equally.”

Fernando Henrique Cardoso, former President of Brazil, said:

“We have witnessed human suffering that should never have been allowed to take place, and for which the regime bears the ultimate responsibility. The deliberate assaults on civilians, often entire families, constitute abuse of power of the worst kind.

“Entire communities in Syria are paying the price of requesting a life of freedom and dignity. We stand in solidarity with those people who have exercised their right to have a say in the future of their nation, only to have been violently repressed for doing so.”

Jimmy Carter, former US President, said:

“We urge Syrians of all backgrounds and political outlooks to reach out to one another. There are only gains to be made from working together to spell out what the endgame and transition should look like, and reach the necessary assurances now to secure longstanding peace and stability for all citizens.

“The solution must be Syrian-led and -owned but needs unified international support. This is the only way out of an increasingly volatile situation, which by now is also having an impact on regional stability and peace.”

Graça Machel, Mozambique’s first education minister, said:

“The situation of the vulnerable – especially children, women and refugees – is deeply worrying. According to reports by the UN and human rights organisations, children and women have suffered gross human rights violations, including sexual and physical abuse.

“In addition to the hundreds of thousands of Syrians fleeing their homes, if not the country altogether, the fighting has also left a large number of longstanding refugees residing in Syria, from the occupied Palestinian Territory and Iraq, in an extremely precarious situation. Protection and humanitarian assistance must reach all those in need.”

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

“The Geneva Conventions apply in times of conflict not just to government forces, but also armed rebel or militia groups – these are the frameworks that hold people to account for war crimes and atrocities in tragic times like these. The horrendous crimes being committed in Syria on a daily basis must be investigated, and perpetrators held to account.

“The UN Human Rights Council has established an Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria to track transgressions committed by all sides: it is of utmost importance that the members and staff of the Commission be allowed full access to the country.

“The mandate of the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) must be renewed with a greater complement of monitors operating under it. Likewise, these monitors need to be given unfettered access on the ground.”

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).

[Kofi Annan](#) temporarily recused himself from The Elders upon his appointment as Joint Special Envoy on 23 February 2012.

[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.

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