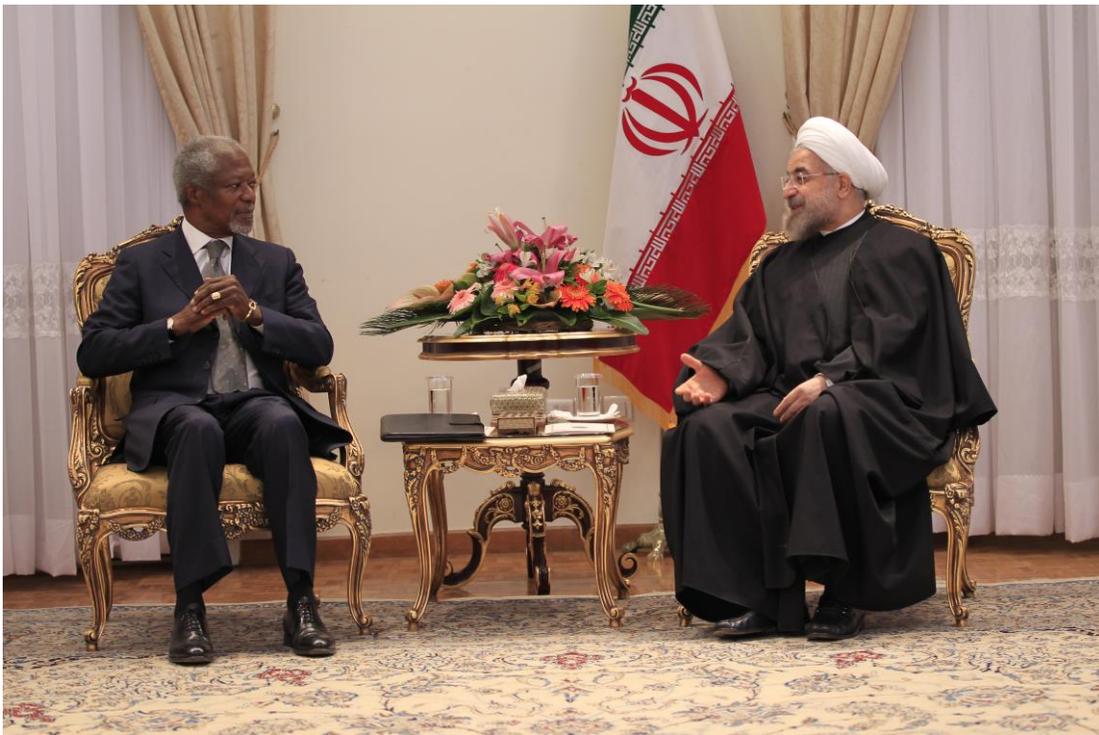


The Elders conclude fruitful first visit to Iran

Kofi Annan: We are convinced that Iran can be a key factor for stability and opportunity in the region

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Kofi Annan, Chair of The Elders, speaks with President Hassan Rouhani during the Elders' visit to Tehran, 28 January 2014. (Morteza Nikoubazl/The Elders)

TEHRAN – Concluding a full three-day visit to Tehran, The Elders offered their support to the people of Iran during this period of renewed openness and dialogue.

While visiting Tehran, The Elders met with various leaders including President Hassan Rouhani; former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani; Speaker of the Majlis, Ali Larijani; Foreign Minister Javad Zarif; Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council General Ali Shamkhani; Head of

the Centre for Strategic Research, Ali Akbar Velayati; and Seyyed Ali Khomeini, grandson of the late Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini. They also met members of the diplomatic community.

After concluding talks **Kofi Annan**, Chair of The Elders, said:

“We are very encouraged by the frankness of our conversations with our hosts. We are convinced that Iran can be a key factor for stability and opportunity in the region, thanks to its historical role and capacity to influence others.”

Among the issues discussed during the visit were: easing of regional tensions; the spread of extremist violence internationally; human rights; and the Syrian crisis. The Elders welcomed and supported the progress being made in the international negotiations over Iran’s nuclear programme.

Mr Annan added:

“We share with our Iranian hosts a deep concern about the tragic situation in Syria. We must do everything we can to end the nightmare that Syrian men, women and children are going through. We believe Iran should be part of the solution to the Syrian crisis.”

Commenting on the interim nuclear agreement signed in Geneva last November, **Martti Ahtisaari**, former President of Finland, said:

“This is an exciting development in the world today. Efforts must be sustained so that a final agreement can be signed by all parties. If the world fails in this, it will not only be the Iranian people who suffer, the stability of the region will suffer as well.”

The Elders also addressed how new economic opportunities could open to Iran and its citizens. Former President of Mexico **Ernesto Zedillo**, who led profound social and economic reforms while in office, said:

“Iran is at a crossroads. It has well educated and cultured citizens, including many young people, who are ready to seize enormous opportunities and take advantage of the global economy. The world needs to engage with Iran and help realise its potential. Because then, everyone will benefit.”

Honorary Elder Archbishop **Desmond Tutu**, who joined the delegation at the express invitation of the Iranian authorities, emphasised his concern for the people of the region:

“We believe firmly that it is possible for all of God’s children to live harmoniously together. Our founder Nelson Mandela, who sadly passed last year, taught us this. And he told us to speak up for those people downtrodden and without a voice.”

The Elders were encouraged by their visit and will now consider their next steps and hope to continue their work to strengthen regional cooperation and an easing of tensions.

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Please note that the Elders will not be available for interviews.

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](#), [Kofi Annan](#) (Chair), [Ela Bhatt](#), [Lakhdar Brahimi](#), [Gro Harlem Brundtland](#) (Deputy Chair), [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#), [Jimmy Carter](#), [Hina Jilani](#), [Graça Machel](#), [Mary Robinson](#) and [Ernesto Zedillo](#).

[Desmond Tutu](#) is an honorary Elder.

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