

OPEN LETTER ON ISRAEL AND PALESTINE FROM THE ELDERS

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC
United States of America

16 November 2023

Dear President Biden

You have a historic opportunity to help end the Israel-Palestine conflict - permanently.

As polarisation increases, the world needs you to set out a vision for peace. That vision must give hope to those who reject extremism and want the violence to end.

We urge you to do two things: set out a serious peace plan, and help build a new coalition for peace to deliver it.

We understand you want to help make Israelis safe. We share that objective, and have condemned the horrific Hamas attacks of 7 October. We share too your commitment to the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. Palestinian and Israeli lives are of equal worth.

Destroying Gaza and killing civilians are not making Israelis safe. These actions will breed more terrorism, across the region and beyond. There is no military solution to this conflict.

The violence is already feeding antisemitism and islamophobia, including in the USA. It undermines your other objectives in the Middle East, Ukraine and elsewhere.

US credibility and interests across the world are at stake.

Israeli policies of expanding illegal settlements in the West Bank, and normalising relations with Arab countries while bypassing the Palestinians, have not made Israelis safe. Successive US governments have been complicit in these failures.

The only way to make Israelis and Palestinians safe is a lasting political solution. It must guarantee the security of Israel, whose people remain under threat. And it must meet Palestinians' legitimate aspirations for their own state. Long denied during 56 years of occupation, these hopes are fading fast, as innocent Palestinians die in the rubble of Gaza and the stolen lands of the West Bank.

Mary Robinson (Chair)
Ban Ki-moon
Lakhdar Brahimi, *Elder Emeritus*
Gro Harlem Brundtland
Fernando H. Cardoso, *Elder Emeritus*
Jimmy Carter, *Elder Emeritus*
Helen Clark
Elbegdorj Tsakhia
Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein
Hina Jilani
Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
Ricardo Lagos
Graça Machel
Juan Manuel Santos
Ernesto Zedillo

For too long the world has spoken of a two-state solution while allowing Israel to build a one-state reality. This has suited extremists in Israel and Palestine who deny the other country's right to exist. It is time to end the empty rhetoric, and implement a serious peace plan that undermines extremists.

This plan should answer who runs Gaza next, end Israel's accelerating annexation of Palestinian land, and address Israel's legitimate security concerns. It must recognise the equal rights of Palestinians and Israelis, and be rooted in international law, including the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Israelis and Palestinians will not end this conflict on their own. The history is too complicated, the politics too polarised, the compromises required too difficult. But peace cannot be imposed from outside. It requires bold leaders with legitimacy and credibility among their peoples, and a commitment to two states living together peacefully. Those leaders are not currently in power in Palestine or Israel.

The USA cannot bring peace to the Middle East on its own. You can help build a new coalition for peace, including countries from the region and Europe who want a just settlement. This coalition can restore a political horizon, and rebuild the trust needed for dialogue.

Progress will not be easy, or quick. Years of mistrust and violence have left the two peoples far from readiness to negotiate. A comprehensive agreement will take years. It will demand enormous political courage from all leaders, in the face of significant domestic opposition.

Now is the time to start. A serious peace plan is not a distraction from resolving the current crisis; it is a prerequisite. There is a slender opportunity to build on yesterday's UN Security Council Resolution. But progress is more likely if that is seen as the first step towards a lasting peace, not just de-escalation.

De-escalation is not enough. We cannot go back to managing the conflict. It will erupt again and again with more death and misery. The conflict must be resolved, permanently, through negotiation.

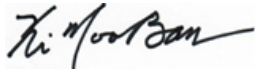
President Biden, you said last month that American leadership is what holds the world together. This conflict is tearing the world apart. We have spoken to Israelis whose families were murdered and taken hostage, and Gazans suffering a humanitarian catastrophe. We recognise their pain, anger and fear. We encourage you and Secretary Blinken to continue working to release Israeli hostages, and end the collective punishment of Palestinian civilians.

The Elders learned from our founder, Nelson Mandela, that the road from hatred to forgiveness can be long and difficult. Some will never walk it. But the majority of Palestinians and Israelis want to live in peace, not endure yet more violence. Please help them find the path to peace.

History will never forget your leadership if you do.



Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and Chair of The Elders



Ban Ki-moon, former UN Secretary-General and Deputy Chair of The Elders



Graça Machel, Founder of the Graça Machel Trust, co-founder and Deputy Chair of The Elders



Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway and former Director-General of the WHO



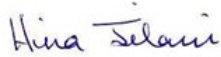
Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and former UN Development Programme Administrator



Elbegdorj Tsakhia, former President and Prime Minister of Mongolia



Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights



Hina Jilani, Advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan and co-chair of the Taskforce on Justice



Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former President of Liberia and Nobel Peace Laureate



Ricardo Lagos, former President of Chile



Juan Manuel Santos, former President of Colombia and Nobel Peace Laureate



Ernesto Zedillo, former President of Mexico