

## **The Elders warn that failures of political leadership risk collapse of international order**

**29 MAY 2024**

The world stands on the edge of a precipice. The foundations of international law and multilateral cooperation are at serious risk of collapse due to cumulative failures of political leadership. We face the most perilous moment since the Second World War.

The United Nations and other institutions created to promote the stability and accountability that come through the rule of law are under attack. The growing climate of impunity for states and leaders, who show no respect for the principles on which they were founded, may take us to a point of no return.

The principles of the UN Charter risk being subsumed by aggressive nationalism and great power rivalry. This is not in any state's long-term interest, given the existential threats to humanity that can only be tackled by global cooperation within a framework of agreed rules.

International law must be applied universally. No country is above the law. But the double standards being displayed by some states, particularly the most powerful, weaken the credibility of global institutions charged with upholding the rule of law.

Russia's war on Ukraine remains an act of aggression against a sovereign state and a fundamental attack on the UN Charter with global ramifications. Russian leaders must be held accountable. We support the International Criminal Court's (ICC) efforts to bring them to justice.

The ICC and the International Court of Justice are both fulfilling their mandates to hold parties in the Israel-Hamas conflict to account under international law.

We oppose any attempts to de-legitimise this work, and threats of punitive measures and sanctions against the ICC Prosecutor or other officials.

The rule of law must be applied consistently. Double standards allow autocrats to frame the universal values of human rights and international law enshrined in the UN Charter as Western constructs. They are not. They serve the interests of every country.

The crumbling of the international order can be seen in the proliferation of conflicts, neglected by the world's leaders and media, affecting 2 billion people in countries including Myanmar, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Haiti.

The failure last week to agree a new pandemics treaty for approval by the World Health Assembly is another example of weak leadership. Scientists are clear that we risk another lethal pandemic. The world has not learned the lessons from COVID-19. We urgently need leaders to engage directly to secure a global agreement to prepare for, prevent and respond to such pandemics, so the world can cope better next time.

With vital negotiations approaching on the future of the world's climate and biodiversity, countries must have confidence that when they make agreements with each other, those commitments will be implemented.

Now is the time for leaders to be honest with their people. The unpredictability and instability that comes when the rule of law is not guaranteed threatens the security of all countries. In a year of multiple elections, citizens also have a responsibility to cast their vote wisely, choosing leaders who take a longer view of protecting their interests, and rejecting populists who exploit fears and foster division for short-term gain.

As we conclude our board meeting in Brazil, we look to the country's leadership to seize the opportunities presented by November's G20 Summit and the major climate conference (COP30) in 2025, to work with other countries on restoring the credibility of the multilateral system and the trust which underpins it.

To step back from the precipice we are at, those in positions of power must show long-view leadership to build a better world for current and future generations. But time is running out to strengthen the institutions that make possible the collaboration needed to do so.

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## About The Elders

The Elders are independent global leaders working for peace, justice, human rights and a sustainable planet. The group was founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007.

The Elders are [Ban Ki-moon \(Deputy Chair\)](#), [Gro Harlem Brundtland](#), [Helen Clark](#), [Elbegdorj Tsakhia](#), [Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein](#), [Hina Jilani](#), [Denis Mukwege](#), [Ellen Johnson Sirleaf](#), [Graça Machel \(Deputy Chair\)](#), [Juan Manuel Santos](#), [Mary Robinson \(Chair\)](#) and [Ernesto Zedillo](#).

[Lakhdar Brahimi](#), [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#), [Jimmy Carter](#) and [Ricardo Lagos](#) are Elders Emeritus.

[Desmond Tutu](#) (1931-2021) and [Kofi Annan](#) (1938-2018) were founding members of The Elders and served as Chairs from 2007 to 2013 and 2013 to 2018 respectively. [Ela Bhatt](#) (1933 - 2022) and [Martti Ahtisaari](#) (1937 - 2023) were members of The Elders from 2007 to 2016 and 2009 to 2018 respectively.

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