The Elders: We need peace in the Middle East, not just process.

Israeli-Palestinian negotiations must be grounded in international law and human rights – define borders and address security issues first.

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For nearly two decades, there have been peace processes in the Middle East but no peace. In our recent visits to four countries across the region and the occupied Palestinian territory, we heard a consistent message: people want peace, but are sceptical about the process and have little faith in the international community to deliver.

There is now an opportunity to reassess the entire approach to the negotiations. The flawed U.S. effort to secure from Israel another partial freeze on settlement-building, in exchange for generous inducements, as a way of resuming direct talks between Israeli and Palestinian leaders has failed.

We now urge a renewed effort, firmly based in international law and respect for human rights, aimed at defining boundaries between Israel and a new Palestinian state and addressing security issues, without neglecting the other issues at the core of the conflict. Without such focus, we may see the possibility of a two-state solution slipping even further away.

Our primary purpose is to help bring peace and security to Israel and its neighbours. We therefore call on governments and citizens around the world to insist that future negotiations are based on the following:

1. Universal human rights and respect for international humanitarian law must apply equally to all.
2. The occupation must end, and the aim of negotiations should be to define the boundaries of a future Palestinian state based on 1967 borders, including its capital in East Jerusalem. Such an accord could entail, if agreed, a one-to-one land swap to allow for minor adjustments. Initial negotiations should also aim at security arrangements in which both Israelis and Palestinians have confidence.

3. The remaining final status issues can be addressed more effectively once there is an agreement on borders and security.

4. Israeli settlements are illegal and all settlement activity must halt throughout the occupied Palestinian territory including in East Jerusalem.

5. Israel must lift its illegal and inhumane blockade of Gaza and stop the demolition and seizure of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

6. Palestinian authorities in the West Bank and Gaza must end all human rights violations against political critics and rivals.

7. Israel's right to exist must not be denied. Incitement and calls for the destruction of Israel must not be tolerated.

8. The Arab Peace Initiative must serve as the basis for normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab world.

Towards a two-state solution and regional peace

Israelis and Palestinians must ultimately agree to a solution, but they cannot do it alone.

The international community must help them reach that agreement through fair and robust mediation and by reconfirming prior agreements, UN Security Council resolutions, international law and human rights principles.

Citizens must step up pressure on their leaders.

As Elders, we will do all we can to persuade governments around the world to apply a rights-based approach to this terrible conflict and to turn the focus of initial negotiations to border and security issues.

We have already given our support to non-violent protest and creative civil action for peace. We will continue to do so – in person when we can and in spirit when we cannot.

Without a strategy that can deliver a peace agreement based on a two-state solution, Palestinians will continue to live under Israeli occupation, millions of Palestinian
refugees will continue to live without hope and Israel's survival and security remain under threat. If there is no real progress, more violence is the likely outcome.

Our greatest wish is that the Middle East will achieve lasting peace, stability and prosperity for all its people.

About The Elders

The Elders are an independent group of eminent global leaders, brought together by Nelson Mandela in 2007, who offer their collective influence and experience to support peace-building, help address major causes of human suffering and promote the shared interests of humanity.

The Elders are Martti Ahtisaari, Kofi Annan, Ela Bhatt, Lakhdar Brahimi, Gro Brundtland, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Jimmy Carter, Graça Machel, Mary Robinson and Desmond Tutu (Chair). Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi are honorary Elders.

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