

Ernesto Zedillo

Former President of Mexico who led profound democratic and social reforms; economist and advocate of multilateralism, inclusive globalisation, nuclear non-proliferation and drug policy reform.

- President of Mexico 1994-2000
- Recipient of the Franklin D Roosevelt Freedom from Fear Award, 2002
- Chairman of the Global Development Network, 2005-2011
- Commissioner on the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, 2009
- Director of the Yale Center for the Study of Globalization

"Inclusive globalisation is needed not only by the weak but also by the strong; not only to defeat economic polarisation but also to alleviate old and new resentments that threaten the security of our world."

Work with The Elders

In January 2014, Ernesto Zedillo travelled to [Iran](#) with Kofi Annan, Martti Ahtisaari and Desmond Tutu where they met with various leaders including President Hassan Rouhani. The Elders discussed easing of regional tensions, the spread of extremist violence internationally, the issue of human rights and the Syrian crisis, as well as supporting progress being made in the international negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme.

Ernesto Zedillo joined The Elders delegation to **Moscow** in April 2015. Led by Kofi Annan, Ernesto Zedillo along with Martti Ahtisaari, Lakhdar Brahimi, Gro Harlem Brundtland and Jimmy Carter visited Russia to discuss key geopolitical issues. During the trip, The Elders met with President Vladimir Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, as well as former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

In September 2015, Ernesto Zedillo travelled to New York with an Elders delegation of Gro Harlem Brundtland, Hina Jilani and Graça Machel to celebrate the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals. During the trip, Ernesto Zedillo participated in an event on the selection of the next UN Secretary-General as part of The Elders [A UN Fit for purpose](#) initiative.

In February 2017, Ernesto Zedillo joined Gro Harlem Brundtland to address the Prince Mahidol Award Conference on global health. Drawing on his own experiences as President of Mexico, Mr Zedillo explained how to sustainably finance [Universal Health Coverage](#).

In February 2017, he led the Elders' delegation to the Munich Security Conference. Together with Lakhdar Brahimi, Hina Jilani and Mary Robinson, he had meetings with senior UN officials and foreign ministers from across the Middle East, and took part in a panel discussion on the future of the [Iran](#) nuclear deal.

In May 2017, Ernesto Zedillo joined The Elders' delegation to New York to meet UN Secretary-General António Guterres. Led by Kofi Annan, Mr Zedillo along with Lakhdar Brahimi, Gro Harlem Brundtland and Mary Robinson held talks on the new Secretary-General's agenda and the major global threats facing the international community. They also held a private meeting with the UN Security Council in which Kofi Annan underscored the Security Council's special mandate to uphold global peace and security.

In September 2017, Ernesto Zedillo joined Mary Robinson and a former child soldier on how global citizens can foster peace. This event was held as part of The Elders' [#WalkTogether](#) campaign – a year-long effort to continue Nelson Mandela's long walk to freedom by building global empathy and supporting civil society on issues of peace, health, justice and equality.

In November 2017, Ernesto Zedillo joined Gro Harlem Brundtland on a visit to Indonesia to meet President Joko Widodo to commend the country on its UHC reforms and call for more financing to accelerate progress further.

In February 2018, Ernesto Zedillo joined the first Elders delegation to Saudi Arabia to hold with HRH King Salman bin Abdulaziz. Led by Kofi Annan, Mr Zedillo joined Martti Ahtisaari and Lakhdar Brahimi in talks that focused on the broad geopolitical and security environment in the Middle East and the "Vision 2030" domestic reform agenda.

In February 2018, Ernesto Zedillo joined Kofi Annan and Lakhdar Brahimi at the Munich Security Conference for panel discussions and bilateral meetings on conflict resolution in [the Middle East](#) and wider global issues including democracy and globalisation.

In February 2019, Ernesto Zedillo [published an op-ed](#) on the danger posed by the international arms-control architecture collapsing. Warning of the risks of a new nuclear arms race between the US and Russia, Mr Zedillo urged every nuclear-armed state to act responsibly to prevent catastrophe. This coincided with fellow Elders Mary Robinson and Lakhdar Brahimi's presentation at the Munich Security Conference 2019 on The Elders' new initiative on [nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation](#).

A bold reformer

Ernesto Zedillo began his career as an economist, rising through Mexico's Central Bank before being appointed Secretary of the Budget in the federal government in 1988. He became Education Secretary in 1992 and launched immediate, sweeping reforms of the national basic education system.

Elected President of Mexico in 1994, he successfully enacted bold reforms to address the major financial and economic crisis that faced his administration. From 1996 to 2000, Mexico experienced a five-year period of the highest rates of GDP growth in the country's recent history. At the same time, his government made strong commitments to social justice by increasing its spending on social programmes year after year.

His administration also launched PROGRESA, the first 'conditional cash transfer' social programme, following extensive research on the best methods to fight extreme poverty. As part of this, poor families received financial support on the condition that children attend school and receive preventative medical care. The initiative reached millions of families and has since been replicated in more than 40 countries throughout the world.

Zedillo undertook profound democratic reforms – transparency and independence of the electoral institution, fair campaign finance and guaranteed access to media, and an electoral tribunal within the judiciary to solve electoral controversies – paving the way for a robust multi-party democracy in Mexico. He pursued and achieved full independence for the Mexican Federal Judiciary, and appointed a leader of the opposition as Attorney General of the Nation.

Confronting global challenges

Since leaving office, Ernesto Zedillo has worked, both at Yale and as member of a number of international panels and commissions, to find solutions to some of the greatest challenges facing the global community.

He serves on the [Global Commission on Drug Policy](#), chaired by his fellow Elder, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, which calls for a vast rethinking of the 'global war on drugs' debate and proposes better regulation to end the criminalisation and marginalisation of drug users. He co-chaired the Latin American Initiative on Drugs and Democracy and, based on work at the Yale Center for the Study of Globalization, published an edited volume: *Rethinking the War on Drugs through the US-Mexico Prism* (2012).

His work on nuclear non-proliferation includes serving on the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, which released its final report, *Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers* in 2009. In 2007, he was appointed to chair a commission to recommend the future course of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN body promoting the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

He has also worked on a number of initiatives focused on climate change mitigation and, in 2008, published an edited volume, *Global Warming: Looking Beyond Kyoto*.

Championing development

Ernesto Zedillo is Director of the [Center for the Study of Globalization at Yale University](#), where he has taught *Trade Theory and Policy*, *Debating Globalization* and *The Economic Evolution and Challenges of the Latin American and Caribbean Countries*.

He has participated in many initiatives to improve the world's ability to design and implement development policy, notably as:

- Vice-Chair of the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security, 2010-2012
- Chair of the High Level Commission on Modernisation of World Bank Group Governance, which published its recommendations in 2009
- Chair of the Global Development Network, an organisation working with developing country researchers and institutes to support their work, 2005-2011
- Chair of the UN High Level Panel on Financing for Development in 2001