

Graça Machel



"I think The Elders can play the role of amplifying the voices of the millions of citizens of the world who daily are working very hard to make themselves heard."

Co-Founder and Deputy Chair of The Elders; Women's and children's rights advocate; former freedom fighter and first Education Minister of Mozambique.

- Minister of Education and Culture in Mozambique, 1975-1989
- Founder of the Foundation for Community Development in Mozambique (FCD), 1994
- Appointed UN independent expert on the impact of armed conflict on children, 1994
- Member of High-level UN Panel on the post-2015 development agenda, 2012-2013
- Appointed Deputy Chair of The Elders, 2018

Work with The Elders

Graça Machel is a founding member of The Elders with her late husband, Nelson Mandela. In October 2018, Graça Machel was appointed Deputy Chair of The Elders, together with Ban Ki-moon.

One of the world's foremost advocates for women's and children's rights, Mrs Machel has travelled extensively with The Elders to meet leaders, experts and activists on numerous issues including: child marriage, gender-based violence and healthcare in Ethiopia in 2011 and 2019; universal health coverage in Tanzania in 2017; political dialogue and women's empowerment in Zimbabwe in 2019; and numerous meetings at UN HQ in New York on the Sustainable Development Goals, women's rights and youth engagement.

“Activists working at the grassroots sometimes feel isolated when they are at the forefront of such change. We hope that we can unleash each other’s energy and build the momentum needed to end child marriage,” Mrs Machel says.

A constant advocate for good governance, human rights and development in Africa, Graça Machel has joined multiple Elders’ delegations in the region to promote human rights and draw attention to humanitarian issues. She was part of the first Elders’ mission ever in 2007 to Sudan with her fellow Elders Lakhdar Brahimi, Jimmy Carter and Desmond Tutu.

Mozambican freedom-fighter and education reformer

Graça Machel joined the Mozambican Liberation Front in 1973 as a schoolteacher. When Mozambique gained its independence in 1975, she became the country’s first Minister of Education and Culture – the only woman in the cabinet.

Between 1975 and 1989 she was responsible for overseeing an increase in primary school enrolment from 40 per cent of children to over 90 per cent of boys and 75 per cent of girls. As Chair of the ‘National Organisation of Children of Mozambique’, she also worked closely with families to promote literacy and rehabilitate children affected by the country’s long civil war.

The Machel Report: children in armed conflict

In 1994, the United Nations Secretary-General appointed Graça Machel as an independent expert to assess the impact of armed conflict on children. Her groundbreaking report recommended the rehabilitation and social integration of children affected by conflict – with emphasis on providing for all opportunities to access education and skills development. The [Machel Report](#) established a new and innovative agenda for the comprehensive protection of children caught up in war, changing the policy and practice of governments, UN agencies, and international and national civil society.

In 1995 Graça Machel was awarded the Nansen Medal in recognition of her contribution to the welfare of refugee children.

Advancing African development

Graça Machel remains an outspoken champion for Africa’s successes and potential. She founded the [Graça Machel Trust](#) in 2010 which advocates for the rights of women and children on the African continent, as well as good governance and democracy.

As Founder and President of the [Foundation for Community Development \(FDC\)](#), a not-for-profit Mozambican organisation she founded in 1994, she promotes development by increasing community access to information and technology. The FDC supports civil society organisations to strengthen communities, facilitate social and economic justice, and assist in the reconstruction and development of post-war Mozambique.

Graça Machel has also served on the boards of numerous organisations working to prevent conflict and advance development, including the UN Foundation, the Forum of African Women Educationalists, the African Leadership Forum, and the International Crisis Group. She was Chair of the Fund Board for the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) for almost 10 years as well as Eminent Person of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and served as Chancellor of the University of Cape Town for 20 years from 1999 to 2019.

In recognition of her lifelong efforts to promote human rights, education and development, Graça Machel has received the Laureate of Africa Prize for Leadership for the Sustainable End of Hunger (1992), the Inter Press Service's International Achievement Award (1998), the North-South Prize of the Council of Europe (1998) and the Africare Distinguished Humanitarian Service Award (1999), among others.