

Mary Robinson

First woman President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; a passionate, forceful advocate for gender equality, women's participation in peace-building and human dignity.

- Chair of The Elders
- President of Ireland 1990-1997
- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 1997-2002
- Chancellor of the University of Dublin 1998-2019
- UN Envoy on Climate Change 2014-15
- UN Special Envoy on El Niño and Climate 2016
- Adjunct Professor for Climate Justice, Trinity College Dublin 2019

"Part of the wisdom of the Elders is to remind the world that we actually have universal values that are accepted by every government in the world and yet they are not being implemented."

Work with The Elders

Mary Robinson has been a member of The Elders since the group was founded in 2007 and makes it a priority to bring the concerns of ordinary people to the global stage. She was appointed Chair of The Elders in November 2018.

She has travelled to the Middle East several times with The Elders to encourage peace efforts and support Israelis and Palestinians working for peaceful coexistence; visited the [Korean Peninsula](#) to help ease tensions between North and South Korea and learn more about North Korea's chronic food crisis; joined an Elders' delegation to [Côte d'Ivoire](#) to emphasise the importance of reconciliation following widespread civil conflict in early 2011.

In 2012 she visited South Sudan to meet leaders, civil society and refugees from recent fighting, urging a return to dialogue between [Sudan and South Sudan](#). Later that year she was part of an Elders' visit to Cairo to encourage [Egypt](#)'s democratic transition.

A tireless champion of women's equality, she also travelled to Ethiopia in June 2011 with her fellow Elders to convene an international meeting of experts and activists working to end [child](#)

[marriage](#), which was followed by a visit to India in February 2012 to support youth activists tackling early marriage in their own communities.

Mrs Robinson also participated in the [Elders+Youngers](#) project, an intergenerational dialogue on sustainable development between four Elders and four young change-makers during the Rio+20 summit in June 2012.

In October 2012, Mary Robinson was on the Elders delegation visiting the Middle East to draw attention to the imperilled two-state solution in [Israel and Palestine](#) and to lend their support to the [Egyptian](#) democratic transition.

First woman President of Ireland

Mary Robinson was elected Irish President in 1990 and served for seven years as a principled and transformative leader who continued to fight for equality and women's rights throughout her time in office. A firm believer in dialogue and reconciliation, she broke taboos by being the first Irish head of state to make official visits to Britain, as well as regularly visiting Northern Ireland.

She was the first head of state to visit Somalia following the crisis there in 1992, and brought global media attention to the suffering of Rwandans as the first Head of State to visit the country just after the 1994 genocide.

Human rights champion

As UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (1997-2002), Mary Robinson integrated human rights into the United Nations system and became renowned as an outspoken voice dedicated to investigating and exposing human rights abuses across the world.

Mary Robinson founded [Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative](#), which aimed to put human rights standards at the heart of global governance and to ensure that the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable are addressed on the global stage.

As an academic, legislator and barrister, Mary Robinson has always sought to use law as an instrument for social change, arguing landmark cases before the European Court of Human Rights as well as in the Irish courts and the European Court in Luxembourg. A committed European, she also served on expert European Community and Irish parliamentary committees. In 1988 Mary Robinson and her husband founded the Irish Centre for European Law at Trinity College, the University of Dublin. Ten years later she was elected Chancellor of the University.

Tackling global issues

Mary Robinson led the [Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice](#), a centre for education and advocacy on sustainable and people-centred development in the world's poorest communities. After successfully achieving its strategic objectives, the Foundation came to a planned close in April 2019.

She co-founded the Council of Women World Leaders, a network that mobilises women leaders at the highest levels to promote democracy and gender equality. She is a member of the Club of Madrid, a group of global leaders working on governance and conflict issues. She is also:

- Former President of the International Commission of Jurists
- Board Member of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation
- Advisory Board Member of the European Climate Foundation

Mary Robinson served as the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region of Africa from 2013-2014, stepping down in July 2014 to take up the post of Special Envoy for Climate Change. She continued in this post until the end of December 2015 which saw the successful conclusion of the COP21 Climate Summit and the historic Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

In May 2016, Mary Robinson was appointed as the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on El Niño and Climate, along with Macharia Kamau of Kenya, to focus the world's attention to meet the urgent challenges posed by extreme weather events on the poorest and most vulnerable communities.