

## Mary Robinson



*"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."*

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

Mary Robinson is a globally recognised voice on climate change and frequently highlights the need for drastic action from world leaders, as well as the intersectionality of the climate emergency: from intergenerational injustice to gender inequality and biodiversity loss.

- Chair of The Elders, 2018- 2024
- President of Ireland, 1990-1997
- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1997-2002
- Chancellor of the University of Dublin, 1998-2019
- UN Special Envoy on Climate Change, 2014-2015
- UN Special Envoy on El Niño and Climate, 2016
- Adjunct Professor for Climate Justice, Trinity College Dublin, 2019 –

### Work with The Elders

Mary Robinson is a founding member of The Elders and was appointed Chair in November 2018 following the death of Kofi Annan. She resigned as Chair in October 2024, stating, 'part of leadership is knowing when to stand down and make space for others.'

As a member of The Elders, Mary Robinson has addressed the UN Security Council and other agencies on multiple occasions. She has met with world leaders to promote global peace and ethical leadership, including Pope Francis in the Vatican, President Emmanuel Macron in Paris and President Xi Jinping in Beijing to discuss multilateralism, climate change, nuclear non-proliferation and human rights.

Mary Robinson has travelled multiple times to African countries with the Elders, meeting with political leaders and civil society activists to discuss issues of peace, justice and human rights. Missions include Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

Mary Robinson has also been part of several delegations to the Middle East with the Elders to encourage peace efforts and support Israelis and Palestinians working for peaceful coexistence; and visited the Korean Peninsula to try to help ease tensions between North and South Korea and learn more about North Korea's chronic food crisis.

### **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 fought 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 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.

She 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. For this, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama in 2009.

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 Nick Robinson founded the Irish Centre for European Law at Trinity College, University of Dublin. Ten years later she was elected Chancellor of the University.

### **Global justice and gender equality**

Mary Robinson co-founded the *Council of Women World Leaders* in 1996, a network that mobilises women leaders at the highest levels to promote democracy and gender equality. She is a member and former president of the *Club of Madrid*, a group of global leaders working on governance and conflict issues. She is also:

- Board Member of the *Mo Ibrahim Foundation*
- Lead Group Member of the *Scale Up Nutrition Movement*
- Honorary Co-Chairwomen of the *World Justice Project*
- Patron of the *International Science Council*
- Patron of the Board of the *Institute of Human Rights and Business*
- Ambassador for *The B Team*
- Board Member of *Aurora Foundation*

Mary is also the former President of the *International Commission of Jurists* 2008-2011, and was Honorary President of *Oxfam International* 2002-2012.

A tireless champion of women's equality, she 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 communities. She travelled again to Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan in 2013 to meet with women leaders and encourage their participation in the peace process. She also visited the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2013, as the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region, to promote women's rights and where she met with women survivors of sexual abuse.

### **Climate justice champion**

Between 2013 and 2016, Mary Robinson served as the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy in three roles; first for the Great Lakes region of Africa, then on Climate Change until the end of December 2015 which saw the successful conclusion of the COP21 Climate Summit and the historic Paris Agreement on Climate Change and most recently as Special Envoy on El Niño and Climate. She served in this post 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.

Mary Robinson is a strong advocate for climate justice and [intergenerational dialogue](#). She led the [Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice](#) between 2010-2019, 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.

Since 2016, in partnership with One Young World, the Mary Robinson Climate Justice Award has been awarded to young leaders working on impactful climate justice initiatives.

Her work also includes:

- Advisory Board Member of the *European Climate Foundation*
- Member of the Advisory Board of *Sustainable Energy For All (SE4All)*
- Member of the *Campaign for Nature's Global Steering Committee*

- Host of the [\*Mothers of Invention\*](#) podcast
- Member of the *Africa Europe Foundation* Steering Group