

The Elders warn of escalating nuclear tensions following termination of INF Treaty

LONDON, 29 July 2019

The Elders warned today that the imminent termination of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty between the United States and Russia risks sparking an ever greater escalation of nuclear tensions and a breakdown of global security structures.

They noted that each side has blamed the other in a deepening cycle of recrimination. Even if the responsibilities for this breakdown of the INF Treaty are not shared, both sides share responsibility for the future to uphold arms control treaties and pursue disarmament.

The Elders thus called on US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin to act in the interests of all humanity rather than following short-sighted agendas, noting that the consequences of the termination of the INF will be acutely felt in Europe and Asia and will exacerbate global tensions ahead of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in 2020.

[Gro Harlem Brundtland](#), Elder and former Prime Minister of Norway, said:

“The INF Treaty helped to end the Cold War and restore peace and security in Europe. I fear this legacy risks being squandered by one side or the other through a mix of bellicosity and hubris. The leaders of Russia and the United States must refocus their strategies in favour of nuclear disarmament, not escalation. Both leaders have at times spoken in this sense. They must turn their positive words into realistic action.”

The Elders noted with alarm that the probable termination of the INF is only one element of destabilising uncertainty around the future of arms control, given the lack of clarity around the extension of the New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), reports that the US could “unsign” the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and the overall lack of dialogue on any form of arms control between the US and Russia.

Increased geopolitical tensions from the Korean Peninsula to the Indo-Pakistan frontier and the Gulf make it all the more imperative to have a serious, substantial discussion between the nuclear powers to defuse tensions and restore trusted channels of dialogue.

[Ban Ki-moon](#), Deputy Chair of The Elders and former UN Secretary-General, said:

“There is a very real risk that the whole security architecture around nuclear non-proliferation that was built up during the decades of superpower confrontation may collapse, through neglect, miscalculation and ill-founded threat analysis. It is crucial that the US and Russia agree to extend New START as soon as possible, and for the P5 states to get serious about making progress on disarmament ahead of the NPT Review Conference in 2020.”

In the event that the United States proceeds with its intention to withdraw from the INF Treaty by 2 August, 2019, The Elders called on all leaders to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from actions that would further raise security tensions in the European arena. They urged Russia and the US in particular not to unilaterally develop or deploy new INF-range weapons systems, and to consider creative solutions that could help preserve the benefits provided by the INF Treaty as far as possible.

Existing arms control frameworks need not only to be preserved but expanded to counter new technological developments such as hypersonic weapons and space-based delivery systems. This should be done on a multilateral basis with all parties acting in good faith.

[Ernesto Zedillo](#), Elder and former President of Mexico, said:

“The world cannot afford a return to the threat of nuclear annihilation we endured in the Cold War. Multilateral engagement is crucial to securing global peace and disarmament. Today’s leaders need to reassert the key message of Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev a generation ago: a nuclear war can never be won, and must never be fought.”

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The Elders are independent leaders using their collective experience and influence for peace, justice and human rights worldwide. The group was founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007.

The Elders are [Ban Ki-moon](#) (Deputy Chair), [Lakhdar Brahimi](#), [Gro Harlem Brundtland](#), [Zeid Raad Al Hussein](#), [Hina Jilani](#), [Ellen Johnson Sirleaf](#), [Ricardo Lagos](#), [Graça Machel](#) (Deputy Chair), [Juan Manuel Santos](#), [Mary Robinson](#) (Chair) and [Ernesto Zedillo](#).

[Martti Ahtisaari](#), [Ela Bhatt](#), [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#), [Jimmy Carter](#) and [Desmond Tutu](#) are Elders Emeritus.

[Kofi Annan](#) (1938-2018) was a founding member of The Elders and served as Chair from 2013 to 2018.

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