

The Elders back NHI health reforms in South Africa to build social solidarity

CAPE TOWN, 3 September 2019

The Elders today expressed their support for the National Health Insurance (NHI) reforms proposed by South Africa's President **Cyril Ramaphosa**, and urged all stakeholders to act with ambition and urgency to improve publicly-funded healthcare and build social solidarity.

Graça Machel, Deputy Chair of The Elders, **Gro Harlem Brundtland**, former Prime Minister of Norway and Director-General of the World Health Organization, and **Ricardo Lagos**, former President of Chile, met President Ramaphosa in Cape Town to learn more about the NHI Bill currently before Parliament. The Elders also met the Speaker of Parliament and addressed the Portfolio Committee on Health.

As part of their two-day visit to South Africa, the Elders also addressed a public event on NHI at the Charlotte Maxeke Hospital in Johannesburg with Health Minister **Zweli Mkhize**, attended by patients' groups, health professionals, business, labour and academics. They then visited the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto to see for themselves the challenges of healthcare in the public sector.

The Elders said that the NHI reforms offer a critical opportunity for South Africa to improve delivery and accountability in the health system, tackle corruption, and to reduce the inefficiencies and inequalities that currently characterise national healthcare and the private insurance schemes.

Gro Harlem Brundtland said:

"Universal Health Coverage – the principle behind the NHI Bill – is a critical element in any country's path to sustainable development, social solidarity and equality. We have been encouraged by our meetings with the President, the Health Minister, parliamentarians and medical professionals, and their commitment to improving the health of all South Africans. I urge all stakeholders to show persistence and ambition, and to recall that investment in healthcare is an investment in the economy as a whole."

The Elders recalled their experiences of introducing health reforms in their own countries and on an international level, often in challenging economic and political circumstances. They said it was important for the NHI reforms to be based on a publicly-funded single-payer system, and to focus on primary healthcare and preventive measures.

Ricardo Lagos said:

“The NHI reforms are an important step towards reducing inequalities, and will give all the people of South Africa the high-quality healthcare they deserve without the debilitating risk of falling into poverty to pay for treatment. I have no doubt that all South Africans, from the President to frontline health workers, have the resilience and commitment to deliver UHC in an accountable, inclusive and fiscally-responsible manner.”

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About The Elders

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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