

## The Elders call for open access to Kashmir to assess humanitarian and rights situation

**LONDON, 25 October 2019**

The Elders today expressed grave concern at the recent killings by militants and security forces in Indian-administered Kashmir and urged both India and Pakistan to act with restraint and responsibility to defuse tensions.

They called on the Government of India to allow international delegations and monitors full access to Indian-administered Kashmir to properly assess the humanitarian and human rights situation in the territory.

The Elders noted the Government of India had lifted restrictions on tourists to Kashmir, which had been issued on 2 August, three days before New Delhi abolished the territory's previous autonomous status under India's Constitution, and signalled that some mobile phone services would be restored.

India should now lift all travel, internet and phone service restrictions so independent and authoritative assessments can be made of humanitarian needs and alleged human rights abuses.

Amid a suspension of democratic institutions and freedoms in Indian Kashmir, including a two month-long shutdown of Internet services and mobile phone networks, The Elders expressed grave concern at credible reports of serious human rights violations including arbitrary arrests and allegations of torture and sexual assault carried out by security forces.

They reiterated their fears of the risk of renewed conflict between India and Pakistan, both nuclear-armed states, over Kashmir and called on the countries' leaders to urgently adopt mutual confidence-building measures aimed at easing tensions, including more robust channels of communication.

**[Mary Robinson](#)**, Chair of The Elders and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said:

*"The situation today in Kashmir is very dangerous. Blocking Internet access and mobile networks is tantamount to collective punishment which has a harmful impact on public health as well as freedom of expression. These services need to be restored in full without further delay. The Kashmiri people have suffered for decades from being pawns in power games between New*

*Delhi and Islamabad. India and Pakistan both need to assume their responsibility to take appropriate measures to build trust, curb extremism and restore genuine peace and calm.”*

ENDS

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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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