

Attacks on multilateral system threaten global peace and security

LONDON, 3 December 2019

The multilateral system is under unprecedented attack. Isolationist and arbitrary actions by leading powers, including the United States, are threatening to undermine critical efforts to tackle global challenges from nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation to climate change, and the regulation of international trade.

The Elders urge all world leaders to acknowledge that effective multilateralism is in their own national interest, regardless of size or strength. Getting others to cooperate by means of internationally-agreed mechanisms is less costly and more reliable than unilateral force.

Yet since 2017, the US has: withdrawn from the **Paris Agreement on Climate Change**; pulled out of the **Iranian nuclear deal**; left the **UN Human Rights Council** and **UNESCO**; abandoned the **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty**; unilaterally imposed **trade barriers**; and concurrently blocked the appointment of new judges at the **World Trade Organization**.

As an immediate step, WTO member states must respond to persistent US intransigence by appointing without further delay the necessary new judges to the Appellate Body by majority voting, to avoid the collapse of the WTO's entire dispute settlement capability.

Following the formal US notification of its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, all other signatories must now use the upcoming COP 25 summit in Madrid to urgently step up their climate action and ambition. Countries must cut carbon emissions more drastically and quickly than in previously-submitted pledges, and also adopt rigorous monitoring of compliance with such commitments.

The network of international covenants and institutions agreed and constructed since the end of the Second World War, with the United Nations at its core, is far from perfect. But it has nevertheless decisively supported the pursuit of peace, security and the protection of human rights, as well as economic and social progress across the globe, for over seven decades.

It is a sad irony that the multilateral system's principal assailant, the US, is the very country that led the design and construction of its institutions in the 1940s and benefited enormously from it in the subsequent decades.

To make matters worse, the response by other influential powers has too often been erratic, uncoordinated and counter-productive. Most have opted to negotiate bilaterally with the US to try to resolve crises, further eroding existing multilateral frameworks.

This is myopic and self-harming. A regression from a rules-based system into power-based strategies will not result in a safer, more predictable or propitious environment for any country.

Without a concerted commitment to defend multilateralism, we will not bequeath a safe world to future generations. They will neither forget nor forgive such a collective failure.

ENDS

Media enquiries

Luke Upchurch, Director of Communications

T: +44 (0) 7741 742064

media@theElders.org

Sign up to [receive The Elders' press releases](#).

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.

Find out more

For biographies of the Elders, blogs, photos, videos and more information about their work please go to www.theElders.org.

Follow The Elders on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Flickr](#) and [YouTube](#).