

## “Prepare, Prioritise, Promote”: The Elders’ three pillars for public health after COVID-19

LONDON, 11 December 2020

The Elders today launched a new report, *“Building Back Better for Universal Health”*, setting out three key pillars to inform the leadership needed from governments and policymakers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at a national and global level:

- **Prepare** public health systems for future pandemics
- **Prioritise** Universal Health Coverage at a national and global level
- **Promote** healthier societies via holistic policies and social development

Launched ahead of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day on 12 December, the wide-ranging report sets out specific recommendations based on lessons learned thus far from the pandemic, and the wider progress made towards UHC as part of countries’ commitments under the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The report highlights the significant changes that are needed to prepare health systems and societies against future pandemics. The Elders caution that the world cannot lose sight of the fragility and vulnerability of our collective health, despite the welcome news of COVID-19 vaccines becoming available.

The steps required include defining pandemic preparedness and response as a “global public good” that necessitates a multilateral approach, with states and global institutions pooling resources, capacity and expertise to deliver durable responses that reach all of humanity.

[Gro Harlem Brundtland](#), founding member of The Elders, former Director-General of the World Health Organization and Co-Chair of the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, said:

*“COVID-19 has exposed the failures of short-termism, neglect and narrow nationalism that have too often weakened global health policy. National moves towards UHC must go hand in hand with multilateral efforts to strengthen global public health systems. Compassionate leadership and solidarity must lie at the heart of all future efforts: from vaccine distribution to putting vulnerable groups’ needs at the heart of public health.”*

The Elders call on leaders to fully support and empower the World Health Organization as the indispensable multilateral public health institution, and to implement the recommendations of independent review bodies such as the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board and the Independent Panel on Pandemic Preparedness and Response.

Governments must also turn the disruption to economic, social and political models engendered by COVID-19 into a catalyst for wider pro-health reforms as they recalibrate budgets - including fresh approaches to transport, housing, employment and equality.

The report argues that COVID-19 has shown we are all only as safe as the weakest link in our human chain. It is only by embedding solidarity and justice in public health policies that the world will truly overcome the current crisis and face the future with confidence.

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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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