

## The Elders urge global co-operation to manage risks and share benefits of AI

SEOUL, 31 May 2023

**Statement:** The Elders today call on world leaders to work together urgently on the design of strong international governance, to allow all humanity to take advantage of the opportunities of Artificial Intelligence (AI), while limiting the enormous risks.

The group of independent world leaders believe AI has the potential to bring great benefits to human life, including health, education and other aspects of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

However, without proper global regulation, the extraordinary rate of technological progress with AI poses an existential threat to humanity. This threat requires a truly effective multilateral response, not just a series of uncoordinated national responses.

A new global architecture is needed to manage these powerful technologies within robust safety protocols, drawing on the model of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the International Atomic Energy Agency. These guardrails must ensure AI is used in ways consistent with international law and human rights treaties. AI's benefits must also be shared with poorer countries. No existing international agency has the mandate and expertise to do all this.

The Elders now encourage a country or group of countries to request as a matter of priority, via the UN General Assembly, that the International Law Commission draft an international treaty establishing a new international AI safety agency.

Uncontrolled AI could increase the risk of catastrophic events such as an accidental nuclear launch or a bio-engineered pandemic, and is prone to malicious use by terrorists as well as governments. AI also presents significant threats to the conduct of democracy, the protection of human rights and the equal treatment of all citizens.

The Elders thus urge world leaders, from the UN Secretary-General to national heads of state and government, to respond decisively and with moral wisdom to these opportunities and risks, and work on AI in a spirit of co-operation not competition.

The Elders warn that the permissive regulatory model used for the development of the Internet is not fit for this purpose. The potential consequences of uncontrolled AI are so catastrophic that the AI industry cannot be left to self-regulate. They note with alarm how many CEOs of AI companies are admitting they are creating systems whose application no-one fully understands, and the [recent statement](#) by the Center for AI Safety signed by industry leaders identifying AI as a societal-scale risk comparable to pandemics and nuclear war.

With the principles of multilateral cooperation and precaution paramount, AI can be used to address, not exacerbate, the challenges faced by humanity, and secure a sustainable future for us all.

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

*“The world is at a turning point in history, comparable to the advent of the nuclear age in 1945. AI could fundamentally alter how human society is organised, national politics are conducted and international issues are managed. World leaders have a responsibility to ensure that AI is used in ways that are safe, transparent and accountable. These are not just technological or commercial issues, but political and moral imperatives affecting everyone.”*

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### About The Elders

The Elders are independent global leaders working for peace, justice, human rights and a sustainable planet. The group was founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007.

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

[Martti Ahtisaari](#), [Lakhdar Brahimi](#), [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#), and [Jimmy Carter](#) are Elders Emeritus.

[Desmond Tutu](#) (1931-2021) and [Kofi Annan](#) (1938-2018) were founding members of The Elders and served as Chairs from 2007 to 2013 and 2013 to 2018 respectively. [Ela Bhatt](#) (1933 - 2022) was a founding member of The Elders until 2016.

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