



The Elders

Working for peace,
justice, human rights and
a sustainable planet

Strategy 2023-2027



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Using their collective experience, their moral courage and their ability to rise above the parochial concerns of nation, race and creed, the Elders can help make our planet a more peaceful, healthy and equitable place to live.

NELSON MANDELA

launching The Elders in 2007

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Introduction

The world faces a set of threats that put all humanity at risk.

The impact of these threats is already being seen on lives and livelihoods: a rapid rise in extreme weather events, a pandemic that killed millions and cost trillions, a war in which the use of nuclear weapons has been openly raised.

But there could be worse to come – maybe much worse. Some of these threats jeopardise the very existence of human life on our planet. We have the power to destroy ourselves as well as the world we live in. Nations lack the ability or will to manage these risks. We are approaching a precipice.

The Elders were brought together by Nelson Mandela in 2007 to address intractable problems like these. He believed, as do we, that when nations work together, these threats can all be addressed for the good of the whole world. There is still hope. But the world needs a purpose, a moral courage and an urgency of action that is missing from too many current political leaders.

The urgency of the interconnected existential threats we face requires a crisis mindset from our leaders – one that puts our shared humanity centre stage, leaves no one behind, and recognises the rights of future generations.

As Elders, we may not have all the answers. But we strive for a world where common purpose trumps isolationism, impunity no longer goes unchallenged, and people of all ages see the future not with despair but with hope.

We remain resolved to help the world step back from the precipice it has drifted towards, and to improve the life chances of everyone on the planet - and generations not yet born.

Our strategy for 2023-2027 explains how.



Sea surface temperatures in the shallow Bay of Bengal have significantly increased causing Bangladesh to suffer some of the fastest recorded sea level rises in the world.

Photo: Moniruzzaman Szal / Climate Visuals Countdown



Ban Ki-moon, Mary Robinson and Ernesto Zedillo in conversation, New York, 2022.

Photo: Mary Altaffer/AP/Shutterstock

Our vision

A world where people live in peace, conscious of their common humanity and their shared responsibilities for each other, the planet and future generations; where there is universal respect for human rights; where poverty has been eliminated and people are free from fear and oppression, and able to fulfil their true potential.

Our mission

We will use our experience and influence to work for peace, justice, human rights and a sustainable planet. We will engage with global leaders and civil society through private diplomacy and public advocacy, to address existential threats, promote global solutions, and encourage ethical leadership that supports the dignity of all human beings.

Our four **strategic goals** link our vision and mission to the programme outcomes we will pursue, guiding our approach to them all.

01

We seek urgent action on existential threats

02

We promote global solutions to global challenges

03

We encourage ethical leadership and inclusive government

04

We support the dignity and rights of all human beings

Who we are

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

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The efforts of a small, dedicated group of leaders, working objectively and without any vested personal interest in the outcome, can help resolve what often seems like intractable problems.

NELSON MANDELA

on the role of The Elders, speaking at the group's inaugural meeting in July 2007



Ban Ki-moon

Deputy Chair of The Elders

Former UN Secretary-General and South Korean Foreign Minister; championed the world's vulnerable by putting sustainable development, climate change, and gender equality at the top of the UN agenda.



Gro Harlem Brundtland

First woman Prime Minister of Norway; former Director-General of the World Health Organization; a medical doctor who champions health as a human right, and put sustainable development on the international agenda.



Elbegdorj Tsakhia

Former President and Prime Minister of Mongolia; led his country's transition to democracy after the fall of the Soviet Union; an international campaigner on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, climate change and democracy.



Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein

Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; champion of international justice and multilateralism; outspoken advocate for peace and human rights; veteran Jordanian diplomat and peacekeeping expert.



Ricardo Lagos

Former President of Chile; tenacious fighter for democracy and human rights; implemented health reform and reduced economic inequality while diversifying Chile's external trade in the era of globalisation.



Hina Jilani

Pioneering lawyer and pro-democracy campaigner; a leading activist in Pakistan's women's movement and international champion of justice and human rights.



Graça Machel

Deputy Chair of The Elders

Women's and children's rights advocate; former freedom fighter and first Education Minister of Mozambique; co-founder of The Elders.



Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Former President of Liberia and Africa's first elected female head of state; Nobel Peace laureate; a leading promoter of peace, justice and democratic rule; a voice for freedom, and advocate for health for all.



Mary Robinson

Chair of The Elders

First woman President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; a passionate advocate for gender equality, women's participation in peace-building, human dignity and climate justice.



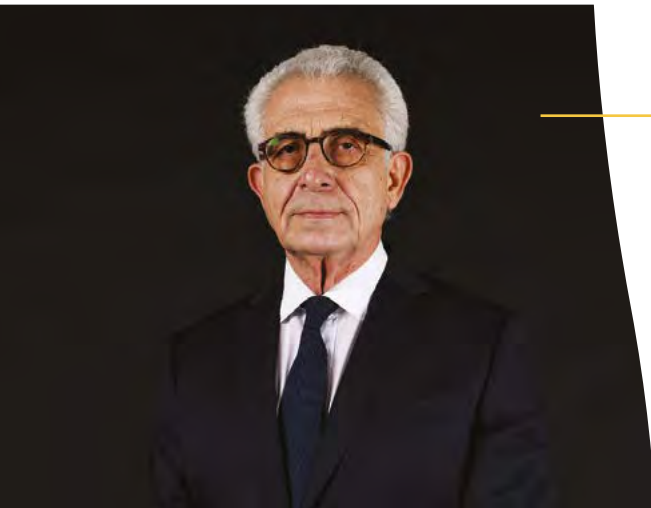
Juan Manuel Santos

Former President of Colombia; a Nobel Peace laureate who led complex peace negotiations, ending over 50 years of intractable civil war; a champion for biodiversity, justice and peace-making.



Elders Emeritus

Since our founding in 2007, we have had 20 members from 20 different countries. Some remain engaged with our work as Elders Emeritus.



Ernesto Zedillo

Former President of Mexico who led profound democratic and social reforms; a renowned economist, and an advocate of multilateralism, inclusive globalisation, nuclear nonproliferation, drug policy reform and universal healthcare.



Martti Ahtisaari

Former President of Finland; Nobel Peace laureate



Lakhdar Brahimi

Former Algerian freedom fighter; Foreign Minister

We remember with great fondness those Elders no longer with us.



Kofi Annan

1938 – 2018



Ela Bhatt

1933 – 2022



Desmond Tutu

1931 – 2021



Fernando Henrique Cardoso

Former President of Brazil



Jimmy Carter

Former President of the United States of America; Nobel Peace laureate



How we work

As former leaders, we know the challenges of decision-making in an unpredictable world. But we also understand the transformative power of empathetic leadership.

In our own careers we have brought peace to intractable conflicts, broken decades-old political norms, led social change, pioneered new thinking on sustainable development, promoted women's leadership, and helped broker historic international agreements. We have learnt that only by working together can the world overcome the shared challenges we all face.

As Elders, we seek to catalyse moral leadership, foster agreement and inspire hope. We champion courageous, compassionate decision-making, and call out those in power who break their promises.

We stand together with those fighting for a sustainable future rooted in inclusivity, equality and justice.

We do this by using our individual reputations and collective experience to impress upon world leaders the importance of ethical decision-making. We work with civil society to challenge impunity and injustice, and provide a platform for those who are unheard in the corridors of power. We convene diverse voices to find solutions to our shared problems.

Private diplomacy

Personal contact and relationships at the highest level are critical drivers of change, so we will continue to prioritise Elders meeting world leaders. Through private dialogue with decision-makers, Elders can have sensitive discussions, help broker solutions, and stimulate negotiations. Elders are well placed to use our collective experience and influence to help resolve tensions. We can also offer leaders private advice based on our own experience and independent view of the world.

Public advocacy

Our public advocacy focuses on influencing world leaders and policy-makers through communications and engagement. We engage with mainstream, specialist and social media to amplify unheard voices and solutions, and inspire ethical decision-making.

Our public narrative balances an emphasis on existential threats with the spirit of hope at the heart of Mandela's mandate to The Elders. We target decision-makers and influential audiences in all regions of the world.

Partnerships

We work in partnership with civil society organisations, think tanks, academics, international organisations, media and other stakeholders to inform our strategy and activities; extend our influence, reach and visibility with decision-makers; and amplify the influence of other organisations that share some of our objectives. We plan to deepen our partnerships, including by working more closely with selected partners, and developing more partnerships with Global South organisations.



What we do and the impact we seek

As Elders, we have the most impact when we have focused objectives, and several Elders engage actively on an issue.

Over the next five years, we will work on three programmes that address existential threats to humanity requiring a collective response - the climate crisis, pandemics, and nuclear weapons – and also on conflict (a threat in itself, and a risk factor for other threats). We will use our independence, collective experience, and moral authority to hold world leaders to account for managing these threats better.

Drawing on our values and our mandate from Nelson Mandela, we have also chosen four cross-cutting commitments to be incorporated selectively into the four programmes: multilateralism, human rights, gender equality and women in leadership, and intergenerational dialogue.



Climate crisis



THE IMPACT WE SEEK

The planetary emergency is contained and the most vulnerable protected through revitalised global cooperation.

Humanity has a rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future. We have less than a decade left to hold the global temperature rise to 1.5°C and avoid irreversible effects on the planet. The climate crisis is hitting the most vulnerable hardest, and accelerating the biodiversity crisis. We need to halve emissions by 2030 and restore nature. Yet the richest 1% of people still emit twice as much carbon as the bottom 50%.

Countries must implement the climate commitments they have made. Lack of political will is the main barrier to making domestic policy changes at the speed and scale needed. The rise in extreme weather events is helping to change this. We can help hold countries to account for their domestic implementation, and advocate for better international cooperation. While the UN will remain the most important multilateral climate space, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), G7 and G20 can also deliver finance and emissions reductions at scale.

Working in close alliance with civil society, The Elders can use our credibility, moral authority, and high-level access to convey the right message, to the right people, at the right time.

A sustainable and just response to the planetary emergency requires that ►

Big emitters are held to account for policies that align with the 1.5°C limit and the global nature goal, and accelerate just transitions

The Elders will:

- Target select G20 countries to promote just transitions in sectors driving the climate and nature crises.
- Hold G7 leaders to their pledge to end all inefficient fossil fuel subsidies by 2025, and push them to lead the world in accelerating the transition to net zero emissions.
- Partner with others pushing for net zero and those working on solutions to minimise risks and maximise impact.

Global solidarity mechanisms strengthen the resilience of those most vulnerable

The Elders will:

- Seek to influence the shape of the new climate finance goal to be agreed by 2025, and push for implementation of the UN agreement to operationalise a loss and damage fund.
- Use our moral voice to press for climate justice underpinned by better and faster finance flows to those who need it most.

Public and private finance is aligned with global climate and nature goals

The Elders will:

- Support the re-engineering of global development finance institutions to raise the trillions needed to tackle the climate crisis.
- Encourage major shareholders on development bank boards to push for reform.
- Call for stricter standards for corporate sustainability pledges.

Voices of women and youth leaders are heard and create the political space for more ambitious action

The Elders will:

- Use our networks to engage and inspire leaders in the women's movement who may not yet have climate as a central concern.
- Keep intergenerational dialogue at the heart of our climate work, championing the voices of new youth and women climate leaders, and act as a bridge to decision-makers.



Pandemics



THE IMPACT WE SEEK

The world is prepared for the next pandemic, through a transformed multilateral system that is sustainably financed, inclusive, transparent, and equitably governed.

Scientific modelling shows the probability of novel disease outbreak is likely to triple in the next few decades, with more contagious and more lethal viruses possible. Public health funding has been diverted from research on emerging infectious diseases to address COVID-19. There is a growing concern that advances in biotechnology could lead to pandemics caused by human-engineered pathogens, through an act of war, bioterrorism or laboratory leaks.

Despite immense suffering caused by COVID-19, we are less prepared for the next pandemic. Multilateral pandemic prevention, preparedness and response (PPR) efforts are sluggish and fragmented. The politicisation of COVID-19, and the failure of so many national COVID-19 responses, have exacerbated vaccine hesitancy and eroded trust in public health leadership.

To address these concerns, we are advocating for a robust global pandemic PPR agenda that should be treated as a global public good, requiring global public investment. Our advocacy will support recommendations put forward by both the Independent Panel on Pandemic Preparedness and Response, and the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, focused on leadership, governance and financing.

We believe tackling pandemics must involve all parts of society, government, and the economy, and that resilient and publicly funded health systems based on the principles of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) are crucial.

The world could respond effectively and fairly to the next pandemic if ►

Strong global political leadership from heads of state/government on pandemics is aligned with the recommendations of recent independent panels

The Elders will:

- Push for a standing high-level pandemic leadership body to hold governments accountable to PPR commitments, monitor progress made by the World Health Organization (WHO), and mobilise and guide resources.
- Support a strengthened WHO, particularly more effective International Health Regulations and increased assessed contributions.

Pandemic financing is transformed, in particular through equitable governance

The Elders will:

- Seek to influence the design and deployment of pandemic financing instruments rooted in equity and shared responsibility, including the newly created Pandemic Fund housed at the World Bank, as well as financing from the IMF, regional development banks, and private foundations.

A clear set of global policies ensure equity and rights in pandemic prevention, preparedness and response

The Elders will:

- Push for a Pandemic Treaty and other global policies and agreements that address systemic barriers to equitable access to vaccines and diagnostics and therapeutics, including barriers to regional manufacturing.
- Highlight the need for fair and unified global pandemic surveillance platforms that reward countries identifying potential pandemic pathogens.
- Call for the economic and social conditions that put the burden of care on women, both in families and in the health workforce, to be addressed.



Nuclear weapons



THE IMPACT WE SEEK

Current and future generations are free from the threat of nuclear destruction.

Despite reductions in nuclear stockpiles since the end of the Cold War, almost 13,000 nuclear warheads remain in existence. Experts suggest these numbers are set to increase. Some nuclear states are modernising or expanding their capabilities, while some have increased the role of nuclear weapons in their security policies and nuclear postures. New technologies, including hypersonic nuclear-capable missiles, AI and cyber capabilities, are reducing the amount of time leaders have to make decisions in a crisis, and increasing the risks of nuclear conflict through accident or miscalculation. The increasing erosion of the taboo against nuclear use has added to this danger.

While the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has helped to prevent widespread nuclear proliferation, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) seeks to reinforce legal and normative frameworks against nuclear weapons, the existing multilateral architecture cannot make progress towards disarmament without commitments and action from states.

To address these concerns, we will seek to increase global attention on the nuclear threat. We will engage multilaterally and work with groups that aim to rethink approaches to nuclear weapons. We believe greater engagement from political leaders on nuclear issues, as well as the wider public, can help to overcome structural obstacles to change.

Reducing the threat of nuclear destruction requires that ►

International attention on the nuclear threat is increased

The Elders will:

- Challenge the relatively low priority given to the nuclear threat on the international agenda.
- Influence decision-makers in nuclear states to view the nuclear threat with more urgency, and encourage them to establish and strengthen dialogue mechanisms.

The international architecture for nuclear non-proliferation, arms control and risk reduction is protected and strengthened

The Elders will:

- Use convening and private diplomacy to encourage the protection of existing arms control agreements, and the development of new risk reduction agreements and norms, to manage and reduce the risk of nuclear conflict.

An inclusive nuclear policy community and grassroots movement is built that can challenge status quo thinking on nuclear weapons

The Elders will:

- Encourage new actors to enter the nuclear field and give credibility to those challenging conventional wisdom on issues like nuclear deterrence.
- Argue that nuclear weapons are a source of insecurity, not security, in our public and private advocacy.
- Promote gender equality and intergenerational dialogue as being central to a more inclusive nuclear policy community and grassroots movement.



Conflict



THE IMPACT WE SEEK

Global peace and security are improved through enhanced respect for international law, and more inclusive national and international dialogue.

Russia's war on Ukraine has exposed the failings of an international peace and security system already in deep crisis, unable to respond effectively to conflicts between and within states across the world.

In the emerging, multi-polar phase of big power relations, new conflicts may emerge. Global tensions are being exacerbated by the rise of ultra-nationalist politics. Widespread impunity is fuelling the systematic violation of international law. Accountability mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court are selectively opposed, undermining their deterrent effect and the rules-based order. Conflict-related sexual violence is pervasive. Conflict is a risk factor for existential threats (notably nuclear weapons and pandemics), while new forms of warfare pose serious challenges.

The Elders' value includes our willingness to talk privately to all conflict parties, to speak out on difficult issues, and to get access to decision-makers at the highest political levels. We will engage on high priority conflicts based on their global or regional significance, the demand for our engagement, and our ability to play a distinctive role (initially focusing on Russia/Ukraine and Israel/Palestine). We will also push for endorsement and implementation of far-reaching reforms of the international conflict architecture, where a consistent approach to human rights will be integral to reinforcing international law and accountability.

Global peace and security would improve if ►

International law and accountability are reinforced in conflict contexts

The Elders will:

- Champion adherence to the international rule of law, defend the UN Charter, and use our cross-regional voice to reinforce universal norms and values.
- Highlight the most serious violations such as alleged crimes against humanity and call for accountability and redress.
- Support and amplify civil society organisations and accountability bodies which face pressure from states under scrutiny.

Inclusive dialogue and diplomacy are promoted to resolve conflict, including the role of women as agents for peace

The Elders will:

- Use private diplomacy to explore ways to prevent and resolve conflicts.
- Promote inclusive dialogue as the foundation for achieving just and sustainable peace, highlighting the role of women within security and defence dialogue as well as peace-building.

- Urge states to engage in constructive dialogue in multilateral fora, highlighting issues where common ground can be found amid deepening divisions.

The international peace and security architecture is protected and reformed

The Elders will:

- Use our credibility as international leaders to push for reform of the institutions managing peace and security, particularly the UN Security Council.
- Identify and champion ambitious, politically feasible reform proposals, including through engagement with a range of initiatives led by the UN and others feeding into the UN Summit of the Future in 2024.

Cross-cutting commitments

We believe that four cross-cutting commitments – multilateralism, human rights, gender equality and women in leadership, and intergenerational dialogue – are essential to realising our strategic goals and achieving sustainable impact. Each of our programmes will include specific activity, and dedicated resource, to address these areas.

Multilateralism

Even the most powerful states cannot effectively address the threats facing the world acting alone. It is in every country's interest to have strong multilateral institutions that can uphold a rules-based international system and tackle the world's shared challenges. Yet despite this urgent need, the world is increasingly facing a crisis of multilateralism, with powerful states prioritising short-term national agendas over long-term global stability, while practising double standards in their application of international law, and breaking their promises. We aim to defend and promote multilateralism as a source of global solutions to global challenges.

We will:

- Advocate for strengthened international cooperation and multilateral solutions, including helping existing multilateral processes like the UN climate, biodiversity and nuclear non-proliferation conferences deliver the outcomes the world needs.
- Press for reforms to the multilateral system, for instance to address deficiencies in the global pandemic architecture and the UN's peacebuilding/security structures.
- Help build momentum behind promising reform ideas, give thought leadership on longer-term structural changes, and make the case for multilateralism to countries who block reform or do not see the multilateral system as being in their interests.

Human rights

Across the world, respect for universal human rights is in steady decline, even in countries traditionally considered to have a strong track record. The Elders' moral voice on human rights draws on the international legal framework. The rules-based order is contingent on countries upholding their commitments. The Elders will bring visibility to systematic violations of international law and human rights, be they related to climate justice, war crimes, or vaccine inequity.

We will:

- Support international mechanisms for justice and accountability to combat impunity for gross human rights violations.
- Help demystify and promote legal instruments and mechanisms protecting human rights and humanitarian law through our public and private communications.
- Build partnerships with think tanks, academics, and civil society groups to help integrate an informed human rights approach across all our programmes.

Gender equality and women in leadership

Violence against women and girls remains endemic and is exacerbated by global health, climate and humanitarian crises.

The gender gap in global leadership and representation remains stark, particularly in nuclear and conflict negotiations. Our aim is to promote gender equality and women in leadership across all our programmes, whilst also highlighting accountability for preventing and responding to gender-based violence, particularly in our conflict work.

We will:

- Advocate for women's leadership and transformative approaches to women's participation at the global, regional, and national level.
- Promote the voices of feminist and women-led movements working on Elders' priorities, with a focus on organisations and individuals from the Global South.
- Commit to a more gender-inclusive and equitable way of working in all we do.

Intergenerational dialogue

Intergenerational dialogue is an underused asset in creating global solutions to today's global challenges, without compromising the potential of tomorrow. We will champion intergenerational dialogue that listens to and learns from young people, platforms their vital voices, and turns dialogue into action.

We will:

- Create pressure on world leaders, international institutions, and those managing policy to put youth participation and leadership at the core of decision-making.
- Seek opportunities to convene older and younger generations to share knowledge and build a collective understanding of how to tackle global challenges.
- Amplify the voices of different generations with a particular focus on lifting up marginalised youth voices and the voices of those most affected by global threats.
- Promote the narrative that the needs of present generations should always be considered alongside efforts to avoid compromising the needs of future generations.



Mary Robinson and climate justice activist Vanessa Nakate together in Kampala, Uganda, 2022.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the individuals, trusts and foundations who make up our Advisory Council for their advice and guidance. We thank them and all those who support and fund our work.

More information is available at theelders.org/WhoWeAre



The Elders in Cape Town, South Africa, 2022.

Image captions

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With thanks to Jeff Moore and Motlabana Monnakgotla for images of the Elders.

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1. Graça Machel delivers a speech at an event organised by the Zimbabwean Council of Churches, Zimbabwe, 2019. Photo: Annie Mpalume.
2. Mary Robinson examines a new weather warning system in Namutumba District, Uganda, 2022.
3. Elders visit a refugee camp in the Gambella region of Ethiopia, 2019.
4. Elbegdorj Tsakhia becomes a member of The Elders, 2022.
5. Ban Ki-moon and Juan Manuel Santos meet President Zelenskyy in Kyiv, Ukraine, 2022. Photo: Sarsenov Daniyar
6. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein films an Elders' State of Hope talk in New York, USA, 2021.

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1. Elders gather in London, UK, 2022. Photo: Jeff Moore.
2. Hina Jilani champions human rights for all at an Elders' event in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2018.
3. Ricardo Lagos writes a message of peace marking the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 2020.
4. Mary Robinson in dialogue with Teresa Ribera Rodriguez at COP26, Glasgow, UK, 2021.

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1. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf discusses climate change and women's leadership at the High-Level Week of the UN General Assembly, in New York, USA, 2022.
2. Gro Harlem Brundtland in conversation at One Young World in London, UK, 2021.
3. Juan Manuel Santos and Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein discuss what they have learnt in Gambella, Ethiopia, 2019.
4. Graça Machel greets a mother and her baby in a health centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2019.
5. Ernesto Zedillo, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein and Juan Manuel Santos at The Elders' Board Meeting in Cape Town, South Africa, 2022.
6. Mary Robinson listens to young people from Japan at COP26 in Glasgow, UK, 2021.

Nelson Mandela in Franschhoek Valley, South Africa, 1996.

Photo: Louise Gubb/CORBIS SABA/Corbis via Getty Images



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It always seems impossible,
until it is done.

NELSON MANDELA

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THE ELDERS' MISSION 2023-2027
