

Failure to respect rule of law risks collapse of global stability

30 October 2024

The Elders express their alarm at the escalating crises facing the world: a proliferation of conflicts, abuse of human rights and insufficient progress on protecting the planet.

The foundations of the post-1945 international order are rotting through neglect, complacency and sabotage, exacerbating the profound lack of trust between countries and a rise in violent conflicts. Hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians are dying as a result.

We struggle to find the words to convey our horror at the destruction unleashed by Israel's government on the people of Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon in its disproportionate response to the terrorist attacks by Hamas. We remain outraged at Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, which grinds on relentlessly. And we are revolted by the scale of the killing, total impunity and humanitarian catastrophe in other countries, not least Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

This increasing chaos stems from various causes: violations of international law by many countries (including major powers) over many years, non-compliance and rejection of international agreements, and paralysis within the decision-making bodies charged with preventing and resolving conflicts.

The pursuit of national objectives by military means rather than diplomacy is precisely the opposite of what the architects of the United Nations intended, and what most people in the world still want, which is peace.

The failure of states – including the permanent members of the UN Security Council – to uphold their responsibilities has created a vacuum which geopolitical rivalry and bellicose confrontation is filling. Repeated vetoes on the Security Council are an abuse of the position of permanent members which is increasingly questioned in a multipolar world where other countries are playing a more constructive role.

The upcoming American presidential election will have long-lasting and global repercussions. Whoever wins on 5 November will bear a heavy responsibility to uphold the legacy of the USA

as one of the principal creators of the multilateral system that has underpinned global peace and security since the Second World War.

All of humanity is confronted with existential threats – the climate and nature crisis, pandemics, nuclear weapons and unregulated Artificial Intelligence – that can only be addressed by countries defusing these geopolitical tensions and working together.

Leaders and citizens alike share a responsibility to reject this slide into disorder and anarchy and restore the peaceful resolution of disputes through diplomacy and the rule of law.

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