

The Elders call for bold action by world leaders to end Israel's unlawful occupation

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The Elders today call on political leaders worldwide, and especially those with influence on Israel, to enforce the historic ruling by the International Court of Justice and bring an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory.

They welcome the authoritative opinion issued by the ICJ on 19 July as a definitive statement of international law. The legal consequences of this should now be implemented in full by Israel, United Nations member states and the UN itself.

The ICJ, as the principal judicial organ of the UN, found that Israel's presence throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) including the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, is unlawful. It further found that Israel's policies and practices amount to annexation of large parts of Palestinian territory, and constitute a breach of its international obligations on racial segregation and apartheid.

The Elders note the Court's conclusion that Israel's security needs can never justify permanent occupation or annexation of territory. Successive Israeli governments have been violating the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, and the prohibition of the acquisition of territory by force, for more than five decades.

At a time of political upheaval and growing geopolitical tensions, the world cannot be distracted by political events elsewhere. The ICJ ruling is a clarion call that should galvanise all leaders who respect the rule of law and are committed to a just and equitable multilateral system.

At the same time, leaders must retain an urgent focus on the situation in Gaza. We need to see intensifying efforts to secure a ceasefire in Gaza, the release of all Israeli hostages and arbitrarily detained Palestinian prisoners, and humanitarian access to address catastrophic hunger and the risk of famine across the whole of Gaza.

The terrorist attacks by Hamas on 7 October 2023 were shocking war crimes which the Elders unequivocally condemned at the time and do so again today. Almost 40,000 Palestinians are estimated to have been killed by Israeli forces since the Hamas attacks. The death toll continues to rise every day but is seemingly tolerated by some countries, while UN Security Council Resolution 2735 remains unimplemented and a ceasefire deal out of reach.

Israel has already failed to implement the provisional measures previously ordered by the ICJ, including halting its military offensive in Rafah and ensuring unhindered humanitarian access. The ongoing atrocities against civilians being perpetrated by Israel in Gaza add weight to allegations that genocide is being committed, on which the ICJ will make a final determination.

World leaders now need to make it clear whether they believe in the rule of law or not. The people of the world are watching, waiting and willing justice to prevail.

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