

## **War in Iran: Elders call for consistency in defence of the international rule of law**

**18 March 2026**

The Elders warn today that countries will be drawn into an illegal war if they acquiesce to continuing US demands around the Iran crisis, such as to assist in securing the Strait of Hormuz for shipping. We urge countries to stand up collectively, resist pressure, and make it clear that those who initiated this war are responsible for its consequences and for ending it quickly.

International law should not be invoked selectively. Many Western leaders rightly insisted that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 demanded an unequivocal response. They were swift to criticise states who put their economic interests above principle.

Yet many of the same leaders now hesitate to call out unlawful military action by the USA and Israel. This hypocrisy is not lost on audiences in the Middle East or across the Global South. It is eroding trust in international institutions, and feeding the perception that Western countries invoke rules only when politically convenient.

The recent UN Security Council resolution condemning Iranian attacks on neighbouring states, while omitting any reference to the initial US-Israeli strikes, illustrates this troubling selectivity. When the Council applies the law unevenly, it undermines its own authority.

The ongoing US and Israeli aggression against Iran and Iran's retaliatory strikes across the Gulf and Eastern Mediterranean threaten grave consequences for regional security and the global economy.

Military action will deliver neither peace, justice, nor the respect for human rights Iranians deserve following longstanding, systematic violations and the recent bloody repression of peaceful protesters by the regime.

The lack of a coherent US strategy raises the prospect of instability within Iran comparable to that following the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. This danger is further increased by uncertainty over the location and status of Iran's stockpiles of highly enriched uranium.

There is no military solution to nuclear proliferation. When nuclear-armed states strike a non-nuclear state during negotiations, the message is unmistakable: that possessing nuclear weapons could provide protection. The most likely consequence of the illegal war launched on Iran is not greater security, but rather further incentives for nuclear proliferation.

Leaders who say they believe in international law must stick to their principles, and put long-term stability above short-term considerations.

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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.

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[Ban Ki-moon](#), [Lakhdar Brahimi](#), [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#), [Ricardo Lagos](#) and [Muhammad Yunus](#) are Elders Emeritus.

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