

## **The Elders warn US, Israeli strikes on Iran have intensified global nuclear proliferation risks**

**24 June 2025**

The US and Israeli military strikes on Iran over the past two weeks are illegal, and have sent a dangerous message about the normalisation of military might overriding the rule of law. They cannot be justified as legitimate self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter, and no credible evidence of an imminent attack by Iran has been put forward.

These acts have undermined nuclear diplomacy and risk fuelling a new wave of proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East and globally. The ceasefire announced overnight must be respected in full to restore stability and space for diplomacy.

We are extremely concerned about the loss of oversight over Iran's stockpiles of enriched uranium in light of the US strikes. We reaffirm the critical role of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and that nuclear facilities should never be targeted under any circumstances.

All parties should commit to upholding a full ceasefire and refrain from any further unilateral military action or retaliatory attacks. Over the past week, we have been confronted by the alarming risk that the collapse of the Iranian state could result in fissile material ending up in the hands of terrorists and other non-state actors, with potentially disastrous consequences.

Diplomacy has always presented the most effective path towards ensuring that Iran does not become a nuclear state. This was exemplified by the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), which was effectively constraining Iran's nuclear programme prior to President Trump's unilateral withdrawal in 2018. Immediately prior to Israel's attack, Iran and the USA were engaged in negotiations to exchange long-term restrictions on Iran's nuclear programme for sanctions relief.

The recent military strikes are unlikely to significantly set back Iran's nuclear capabilities in the long-term. On the contrary, they may push the Iranian leadership into a decision to actively pursue nuclear weapons that it has not yet taken. We urge Iran not to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to continue to allow IAEA access.

All sides should seize the opportunity presented by the fragile ceasefire agreement to return to dialogue, underpinned by international law, to find a sustainable way out of the current crisis.

It is equally vital that this crisis does not distract political leaders from working to end the Gaza war, Russia's ongoing war on Ukraine, and other conflicts around the world.

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[Ban Ki-moon](#), [Lakhdar Brahimi](#), [Fernando Henrique Cardoso](#), [Ricardo Lagos](#) and [Muhammad Yunus](#) 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) and [Martti Ahtisaari](#) (1937 - 2023) were members of The Elders from 2007 to 2016 and 2009 to 2018 respectively. [Jimmy Carter](#) (1924-2024) was also a founding member of The Elders.

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