

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu Announce *The Elders* – An Historic Group of World Leaders

Johannesburg, South Africa – Out of deep concern for the challenges facing all of the people of our world, Nelson Mandela, Graça Machel, and Desmond Tutu have convened a group of leaders to contribute their wisdom, independent leadership and integrity to tackle some of the world's toughest problems.

Nelson Mandela announced the formation of this new group, *The Elders*, today in a speech he delivered on the occasion of his 89th birthday. He was joined by founding members of the group, Desmond Tutu, Graça Machel, Kofi Annan, Jimmy Carter, Li Zhaoxing, Mary Robinson and Muhammad Yunus. Founding members, Ela Bhatt and Gro Harlem Brundtland were unable to attend.

"This group can speak freely and boldly, working both publicly and behind the scenes on whatever actions need to be taken," Mandela commented. "Together we will work to support courage where there is fear, foster agreement where there is conflict, and inspire hope where there is despair."

Tutu, Chair of *The Elders* remarked, "Despite all of the ghastliness that is around, human beings are made for goodness. The ones who ought to be held in high regard are not the ones who are militarily powerful, nor even economically prosperous. They are the ones who have a commitment to try and make the world a better place. We – *The Elders* – will endeavor to support those people and do our best for humanity."

The Elders will use their unique collective skills to catalyze peaceful resolutions to long-standing conflicts, articulate new approaches to global issues that are or may cause immense human suffering, and share wisdom by helping to connect voices all over the world. They will be working together over the next several months to carefully consider which specific issues they will approach. *The Elders'* criteria are not only the magnitude and importance of the challenge, but a deliberate view that their role could contribute significantly to solving the problem.

In addition to working independently, *The Elders* will work to complement, not duplicate or compete with the efforts of other organizations. They will seek opportunities to partner with established groups in ways that help shine a light on work already underway or to assist in bringing the group's efforts to another level.

"I see *The Elders* as a small but independent group that may fill an existing void in the world community," said Jimmy Carter. "Almost impervious to the consequences of outside criticism, the group will conduct unrestrained analyses of important and complex issues and share our ideas with the general public and with others who might take action to resolve problems."

The Elders will invite new members who share the attributes of the original ten: trusted, respected worldly-wise individuals with a proven commitment and record of contributing to solving global problems. *Elders* will step down if they are elected to public office.

“I have worked with extraordinary people at the community level, people who have brilliant ideas and are making a huge effort to solve problems but often their contribution is localized, and their voices are not strong enough to be heard,” said Graça Machel. “*The Elders* can play a role in amplifying the voices of the millions of citizens of the world.”

Several years ago entrepreneur Richard Branson and musician and activist Peter Gabriel discussed with Mandela the obstacles to solving difficult conflicts facing the world. Their idea of a small, dedicated group of leaders, working objectively and without any vested personal interest in the outcome, began to develop and eventually grew into *The Elders*.

Founder Peter Gabriel said, “In traditional societies, the elders always had a role in conflict resolution, long-term thinking and applying wisdom wherever it was needed. We are moving to this global village and yet we don’t have our global elders. *The Elders* can be a group who have the trust of the world, who can speak freely, be fiercely independent, and respond fast and flexibly in conflict situations.”

The Elders will be independently funded by a group of Founders, including Branson and Gabriel. Additional Founders include: Ray Chambers; Michael Chambers; Bridgeway Foundation; Pam Omidyar, Humanity United; Amy Robbins; Shashi Ruia, Dick Tarlow; and The United Nations Foundation.

“This group of *Elders* will bring hope and wisdom back into the world. To play a role in bringing us together to stop unnecessary human suffering and to celebrate the wonderful world that we are so privileged to be part of,” said Founder Richard Branson.

For more information please visit: www.theElders.org
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