

Topic: The Mission of *The Elders* in the Occupied Palestinian Territories IFTAR, Grand Park Hotel, Ramallah

Date: 26 August, 2009

Participants:

Members of The Elders who joined the Middle East delegation are:



Ela Bhatt:

Ela R. Bhatt is widely recognised as one of the world’s most remarkable pioneers and entrepreneurial forces in grassroots development. Known as the “gentle revolutionary” she has dedicated her life to improving the lives of India’s poorest and most oppressed women workers, with Gandhian thinking as her source of guidance. In 1972, Ela Bhatt founded the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) – a trade union which now has more than 1,000,000 members.



Gro Harlem Brundtland:

Few people have had an impact on society as global as Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, a medical doctor and Master of Public Health (MPH). She spent 10 years as a physician and scientist in the Norwegian public health system and served 20 years in public office, including 10 years as Prime Minister of Norway. In the 1980s she gained international recognition, championing the principle of sustainable development as the Chair of the World Commission of Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission).



Fernando Henrique Cardoso:

Fernando Henrique Cardoso was President of Brazil from 1995 to 2002. He was elected by absolute majority twice, in 1994 and 1998. Cardoso entered politics in 1982 as a senator and has also served as Minister of Foreign Relations and Minister of Finance. Under Cardoso’s leadership, Brazil recorded a decline in infant mortality rates, a fall in the number of child laborers, the attainment of nearly universal primary education, a reduction in poverty levels, a drop in the number of people dying from AIDS and the resettlement of over 500,000 landless families.



Jimmy Carter:

Jimmy Carter, 39th President of the United States of America, was born in Plains, Georgia in October 1924. He trained and served as a naval officer but when Carter's father died in 1953, he resigned his naval commission and returned with his family to Georgia. He operated Carter's Warehouse, a seed and farm supply company in Plains, until being elected to the Georgia Senate in 1962. In 1971, he became Georgia's 76th Governor. Significant foreign policy accomplishments of his administration include the Panama Canal treaties, the Camp David Accords, the treaty of peace between Egypt and Israel, the SALT II treaty with the Soviet Union, and the establishment of U.S. diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.



Mary Robinson:

Mary Robinson, the first woman President of Ireland (1990-1997) and former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (1997-2002), has spent most of her life as a human rights advocate. As an academic (Trinity College Law Faculty 1968-90), legislator (Senator 1969-89) and barrister (1967-90. Senior Counsel 1980, English Bar 1973) she has always sought to use law as an instrument for social change, arguing landmark cases before the European Court of Human Rights as well as in the Irish courts and the European Court in Luxembourg. A committed European, she also served on expert European Community and Irish parliamentary committees.



Desmond Mpilo Tutu:

Anglican priest Desmond Mpilo Tutu is chairman of The Elders. He was born in 1931 in Klerksdorp, Transvaal in South Africa and trained as a teacher before studying theology and being ordained as a priest in 1960. Tutu became the first black General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches in 1979 and was soon well-known internationally for his commitment to non-violence and for his support for economic sanctions against apartheid South Africa. In 1984, Tutu was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in the struggle against apartheid. In 1986 he was elected Archbishop of Cape Town, the highest position in the Anglican Church in South Africa.

The Elders are supported by others who either founded or funded the organization to enable its members to realize their remarkable ideas and tasks. The delegation of The Elders to the Middle East includes two supporters:



Richard Branson:

Sir Richard Branson is Founder and Chairman of the Virgin Group. Virgin is one of the world's most recognised and respected brands. In 2004, Richard established Virgin Unite, his non-profit foundation. It mobilises the talent and resources from across the Virgin Group and beyond, to tackle tough social and environmental problems in an entrepreneurial way.



Jeff Skoll:

Jeff Skoll creates businesses that result in positive social change. As eBay's founding President, he helped generate entrepreneurial opportunities for millions of individuals around the world. He also launched the eBay Foundation with pre-IPO stock. In 1999, he created the Skoll Foundation, which supports social entrepreneurs whose innovations are poised to achieve large-scale impact. The Foundation reflects Jeff's belief that, to bring about a more peaceful and prosperous global community, we must deploy the most innovative solutions on critical challenges like health, environmental sustainability, economic and social equity, human rights, institutional responsibility, and peace and security.

From The Elders working-team who joined the Middle East delegation is:



Mabel van Oranje:

Mabel van Oranje is the Chief Executive Officer of The Elders. She is also a founder and co-chair, together with Martti Ahtisaari and Joschka Fischer, of the European Council on Foreign Relations. Mabel was the International Advocacy Director of the Open Society Institute from 2003 to 2008 and the Executive Director of the Open Society Institute in Brussels from 1997 to 2003.

About The Elders:

The story of the Elders started in a conversation between the entrepreneur Richard Branson and the musician Peter Gabriel. The idea they discussed was a simple one. In an increasingly interdependent world – a global village – could a small, dedicated group of independent elders help to resolve global problems and ease human suffering?

For inspiration, they looked to traditional societies, where elders often help to share wisdom and resolve disputes within communities. They took their idea to Nelson Mandela, who agreed to support it. With the help of Graça Machel and Desmond Tutu, Mandela set about bringing the Elders together.

Prospective members were invited to join on the basis of a distinct set of criteria. Firstly, and most importantly, they should be independent. They should have earned international trust, demonstrated integrity and built a reputation for inclusive, progressive leadership.

Mandela announced the formation of the Elders in July 2007, on the occasion of his 89th birthday, at a ceremony in Johannesburg. During the ceremony, he described the mission of the group:

"The Elders can speak freely and boldly, working both publicly and behind the scenes. They will reach out to those who most need their help. They will support courage where there is fear, foster agreement where there is conflict and inspire hope where there is despair." *Nelson Mandela.*

You can visit The Elder at: <http://www.theelders.org>

The Work of The Elders:

The Elders amplify the voices of those who work hard to be heard, challenge injustice, stimulate dialogue and debate and help others to work for positive change in their societies.

The Elders do not hold public office and have no political or legislative power. Because they are not bound by the interests of any single nation, government or institution, they

are free to speak boldly and with whomever they choose on any issue, and to take any action that they believe is right.

When undertaking initiatives, the Elders are committed to listening to the views of all groups and individuals – and especially women and young people. The Elders work both publicly and behind the scenes and at all levels - local, national and international - lending support and advice when invited, and sometimes when it is not.

The Elders Visit to the Middle East:

The visit of the Elders to Israel and the Palestinian Territories comes at a time of renewed hope that an historic peace agreement can be reached. However there are also major challenges. The majority of Israelis and Palestinians agree on the need for a two-state solution and comprehensive Middle East peace, but their leaders are deeply divided and the harsh realities of daily life have seen people's optimism fade.

The Elders are travelling to the region to listen to the concerns of all sides and to offer their support to those working for peace. They will speak with a wide cross-section of Israeli and Palestinian society to better understand the difficult issues that they face.

While recognising the important peace efforts underway, the Elders will not be intervening in any political mediation or negotiation efforts. As an independent group, they hope that by directly interacting with ordinary people affected by the conflict and supporting those working for peace and reconciliation at the grassroots, they can help to connect the concerns of the people with the diplomatic process.

The Elders are also extremely concerned about the situation in Gaza. The impact of the blockade on the people of Gaza is immense in humanitarian and human rights terms.

The siege can and must end in a way that meets the needs of the people living there, without threatening Israel's security.

There is currently an historic opportunity to resolve the Middle East conflict in a way that ensures the security and future prosperity of all Israelis and Palestinians. The Elders hope that, through listening to the people and amplifying their stories they can make a small contribution to building the trust and mutual understanding that is needed for those efforts to succeed.