

What's Happening

I N T H E W O R L D ?

BY LAWRENCE GABLE

VOL 14, NO 5 JANUARY 2014

The Elders Continue Nelson Mandela's Work

In December the world received the sad news that Nelson Mandela had died. Mr. Mandela had spent most of his life working against the racist all-White government in South Africa. He had been in prison for 27 years, but after that he had become the first Black president of South Africa. His leadership inspired not only South Africans, but also others around the world.

Nelson Mandela's efforts for peace, freedom and social justice have not ended though. They are continuing through a group that he founded in 2007. It is called "The Elders," eleven former world leaders who work to resolve conflicts and problems around the globe.

The idea for The Elders did not originate with Mr. Mandela. Instead it came from a businessman, Sir Richard Branson, and a musician, Peter Gabriel. In 1999 they were discussing how traditional cultures have elders who use their wisdom and experience to solve problems. The two men felt that the world has become a kind of global village that also needs guidance from elders. That is when they approached Nelson Mandela with their idea.

Mr. Mandela had retreated from public life in 2004. However, he approved of the idea of having elders, so he invited a group of former activists and world leaders to Johannesburg, South Africa. That first gathering of The Elders met on July 18, 2007, which was his 89th birthday. All of them had finished their work as public figures, but they agreed to continue working on the world's toughest problems.

The eleven Elders command international respect. They have years of experience in working for human rights. The Chair of the Elders, Kofi Annan, served as the Secretary-General of the United Nations for ten years. Among the other Elders are the former presidents and prime ministers of Norway, Finland, the United States, Brazil, Ireland and Mexico.

The Elders have three goals. One is to encourage leaders to think about issues as they affect all of humanity, not only their countries and regions. Another is to



Left to right: Hina Jilani, Mary Robinson, Kofi Annan, Ernesto Zedillo, Gro Harlem Brundtland, Martti Ahtisaari, Jimmy Carter, Ela Bhatt and Graça Machel.

build lasting peace. Their third goal is to eliminate extreme poverty from the world and to promote development that will support people for generations to come. In short, they want to end the major causes of suffering so that people can live their lives with dignity and health, and free of fear and hunger.

When The Elders work, usually a few of them go together. They make contact with people on both sides of the conflict. They listen to everyone, and they encourage both sides to talk with each other. In many cases they give ordinary citizens the opportunity to communicate directly with leaders. When their efforts lead to success,

they are careful to give credit to the local people.

The Elders are willing to travel around the world to help with problems. Several of them have been to Egypt. There they met with government leaders and with protestors who demand freedom, jobs and democracy. They have met with leaders in North Korea, where millions of people are starving. In Israel they have met with leaders in an attempt to find a solution to problems between Palestinians and Israelis. Sometimes The Elders cannot help. However, since they are respected figures, their presence draws the world's attention to the problems.

Nelson Mandela had especially strong feelings about getting young people involved in solving problems. He recognized that young people form large percentages of the population in the developing world, but he felt that they do not have enough voice in social issues. Mr. Mandela instructed The Elders to appeal to young people wherever they go and to use their passion to make change.

The Elders understand that making change through dialogue is a slow process. They saw that Mr. Mandela's struggle for freedom and equality for Black South Africans took most of his life. Where there is injustice, war, poverty and fear, they are following his example. They are speaking out against the causes of suffering, and using their influence to protect the human rights of people everywhere.

What's Happening

IN THE WORLD ?

BY LAWRENCE GABLE

VOL 14, NO 5 JANUARY 2014

The Elders Continue Nelson Mandela's Work

In December the South African leader Nelson Mandela died. He had spent most of his life working against the racist all-White government there. After spending 27 years in prison, he became the first Black president of South Africa. His leadership inspired not only South Africans, but also others around the world.

Nelson Mandela's efforts for peace, freedom and social justice have not ended though. They are continuing through a group that he founded in 2007. It is called "The Elders." They are eleven former world leaders who work to solve problems around the globe.

The idea for "The Elders" did not come from Mr. Mandela. Instead it came from a businessman, Sir Richard Branson, and a musician, Peter Gabriel. They knew that villages have elders who use their wisdom and experience to solve problems. The two men felt that the world needs guidance from elders too. When they approached Nelson Mandela with their idea, he liked it.

Mr. Mandela had retreated from public life in 2004. However, in 2007 he invited a group of former activists and world leaders to South Africa. All of them had finished their work as public figures, but they agreed to become The Elders and work on the world's toughest problems.

The eleven Elders command international respect. For years they have worked for human rights. The Chair of the Elders, Kofi Annan, served as the leader of the United Nations for ten years. Among the other Elders are the former presidents and prime ministers of Norway, Finland, the U.S., Brazil, Ireland and Mexico.

The Elders have three goals. One is to encourage leaders to think about all of humanity,



*Left to right: Hina Jilani,
Mary Robinson, Kofi Annan,
Ernesto Zedillo,
Gro Harlem Brundtland,
Martti Ahtisaari, Jimmy Carter,
Ela Bhatt and Graça Machel.*

not only their countries. Another is to build lasting peace. Their third goal is to end extreme poverty. In short, they want to end the major causes of suffering. They believe that people should live with dignity and health, and free of fear and hunger.

Usually a few Elders go to a place together. They contact people on both sides of the conflict. They listen to everyone, and they encourage both sides to talk with each other. Often they help ordinary citizens to communicate directly with leaders too. When

their efforts lead to success, they give credit to the local people.

The Elders travel around the world. Several of them have been to Egypt. There they met with government leaders and with protestors who demand freedom, jobs and democracy. They have met with leaders in North Korea, where millions of people are starving. Sometimes The Elders cannot help. However, since they are respected figures, their presence draws the world's attention to the problems.

Nelson Mandela had especially strong feelings about young people. He felt that they do not have enough voice in social issues. Mr. Mandela instructed The Elders to appeal to young people wherever they go and to use their passion to make change.

The Elders understand that making change through dialogue is a slow process. They saw that Mr. Mandela's struggle for equality for Black South Africans took most of his life. Where there is injustice, war, poverty and fear, they are following his example. They are speaking out and using their influence to protect the human rights of people everywhere.

Background Information

Although Nelson Mandela founded the group, he always served only as an Honorary Elder. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.

The first Chair of the Elders in 2007 was Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa. He stepped down in 2013, and remains an Honorary Elder. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984.

At the group's launch ceremony, they left an empty chair for the human rights activist Aung San Suu Kyi. She was a political prisoner living under house arrest in Myanmar at the time, so the group named her an Honorary Elder. In 1991 she won the Nobel Peace Prize. The government released her in 2010, and in 2012 she won election to parliament. As an active politician she had to give up her title as Honorary Elder.

Professor Muhammad Yunus from Bangladesh was one of the original Elders. He is an economist who founded the concept of microcredit, a policy that grants small loans to people who are otherwise too poor to qualify for loans from banks. He remained an Elder for two years. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

The current Elders:

- KOFI ANNAN, who shared the Nobel Peace Prize with the United Nations in 2001 for their work to make the world "better organized and more peaceful;"
- GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND, who serves as the Deputy Chair of the Elders. She is a medical doctor who was the Prime Minister of Norway for ten years. She also led the World Health Organization for the U.N.;
- MARY ROBINSON, a former President of Ireland and the first United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1997 to 2002;
- JIMMY CARTER, a former President of the U.S. and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002;
- MARTTI AHTISAARI, a former President of Finland who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008 for his efforts to resolve international conflicts;
- GRAÇA MACHEL, the former Education Minister of Mozambique and widow of Nelson Mandela;
- ELA BHATT, the founder of a union called the Self-Employed Women's Association of India;
- HINA JILANI, an international human rights defender from Pakistan;
- FERNANDO H. CARDOSO, a former President of Brazil;
- LAKHDAR BRAHIMI, a former Foreign Minister of Algeria;
- ERNESTO ZEDILLO, a former President of Mexico

Topics for Discussion and Writing

Pre-reading:

- Recount what you heard about Nelson Mandela when he died in December.

Comprehension:

- What are The Elders and what do they do?

Beyond the Text:

- Kofi Annan says that being a good global citizen begins "in your own community." What does he mean?
- Give an example of people in your community who look after each other and reduce their suffering.
- Explain why it is an advantage that The Elders do not hold political office.

Vocabulary (*advanced article only)

Article-specific: elder; racist; social justice; human rights; poverty; dignity; protestor; the developing world*; passion

High-use: to inspire; former; to resolve*; conflict; globe; to originate; traditional*; to retreat; to command respect; to affect*; to eliminate*; to communicate; to appeal to; dialogue; influence

Sources

MSNBC www.msnbc.com December 11, 2013
December 9, 2013

Inter Press Service English News Wire September 5, 2013

National Public Radio "Talk of the Nation"
October 25, 2012

Voice of America News February 9, 2012; April 25, 2011

The Progressive October 1, 2007

Australian Broadcasting System "The World Today"
July 19, 2007

Common Core Curricular Standards

Reading — Grades 5–12

- Quote accurately from text
- Cite textual evidence
- Draw inferences
- Determine central ideas
- Analyze structure of text
- Interpret words and phrases