

# FINDING HUMANITY IN TIMES OF CRISIS



ANNUAL REVIEW 2020



# THE ELDERS

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The Elders are a group of independent leaders, brought together by Nelson Mandela in 2007, who use their collective experience and influence for peace, justice and human rights worldwide.



MARY ROBINSON  
CHAIR



BAN KI-MOON  
DEPUTY CHAIR



GRAÇA MACHEL  
DEPUTY CHAIR



LAKHDAR BRAHIMI



GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND



ZEID RAAD AL HUSSEIN



HINA JILANI



ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF



RICARDO LAGOS



JUAN MANUEL SANTOS



ERNESTO ZEDILLO

**Martti Ahtisaari, Ela Bhatt, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Jimmy Carter and Desmond Tutu**

provide continued wisdom and support as Elders Emeritus.

**Kofi Annan** (1938-2018) was a founding member of The Elders and served as Chair from 2013-2018.



## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

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**“We have all become acutely and intimately aware of the fragility of human existence and the extent to which our fates are interconnected, not just across borders but down the generations.”**

**Mary Robinson**

2020 was a devastating year for millions of people across the world, in terms of health, security, prosperity and community.

COVID-19 turned the world upside down, and even though we can all take heart from the roll-out of vaccines, it is clear that we will be living with the pandemic and its impacts for much of the year ahead.

This means we must all collectively work to restore cooperation and compassion as the necessary guides of world affairs: from pandemic preparedness and responding to the threats of climate change and nuclear weapons; to racial justice, gender equality and respecting the rights of migrants and refugees.

In 2020, The Elders adapted to the new realities of the pandemic by increasing our online engagement across a range of platforms, including a series of intergenerational blogs on the climate crisis from young activists, and a collaboration with the “Finding Humanity” podcast series – a digital debut for our group, which we are delighted to be able to reprise for a second series in 2021.

In the year ahead, the new Administration of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris as President and Vice-President of the United States offers the chance for a “reset” not only in the national politics of the US but in international relations as a whole.

The pandemic has starkly exposed the failures of narrow nationalism and populist politics that

disdains scientific evidence and social cohesion. No nation can tackle this threat on its own, regardless of its power or size.

In 2021, we must apply this lesson to the other existential threats facing humanity, not least the climate crisis. In the words of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, “our future security and prosperity depend on bold climate action”.

It is certainly welcome that the US has re-joined the Paris Agreement, and that the EU, UK and some of the most vulnerable countries have already significantly strengthened their 2030 targets to cut emissions. But the US, Japan, China and other major emitters must now follow suit well ahead of the COP 26 summit in Glasgow in November 2021 – there can be no more excuses for delay or prevarication.

The climate crisis, like COVID-19, knows no borders and pays no attention to national sovereignty.

We have all become acutely and intimately aware of the fragility of human existence and the extent to which our fates are interconnected, not just across borders but down the generations.

2021 must be a year of enlightened and empathetic action, with leaders and citizens alike acting in a spirit of solidarity, inclusion and generosity of spirit.

**Mary Robinson**



## FOREWORD BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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**“The Elders will remain flexible and vigilant in their defence of global cooperation and justice.”**

**David Nussbaum**

2020 was a year unlike any other in The Elders’ thirteen-year history. COVID-19 changed the context in which The Elders works, and the way we work across the organisation, and it is clear that the political, social and cultural impacts of the pandemic will be far-reaching for many years to come.

Before the pandemic came to global prominence, our focus was already on existential threats such as climate change and nuclear weapons, and the indispensability of a shared multilateral response to these challenges.

This was the message that Mary Robinson and Ban Ki-moon delivered at the unveiling of the “Doomsday Clock” in Washington DC in January 2020. It gives me no comfort at all to note how prophetic their warnings were, nor how timely their call for a renewed commitment to multilateralism remains.

The first two months of 2020 began with our usual busy pace of activity, including a meeting between Ban Ki-moon and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh, and a high-level delegation to the Munich Security Conference in February. However, further travel plans came to an abrupt halt in March as global lockdowns were imposed to try to contain the spread of the virus.

Elders and Secretariat staff alike adapted rapidly to the new constraints and work continued primarily through digital advocacy and media outreach. We also continued with activities to mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations in June, including the publication of our new report “Hope for a sea-change: Why multilateralism must reshape the world after COVID-19”.

Travel restrictions meant that both board meetings in 2020 were held online, rather than in Hiroshima and London as had been our intention. Despite the formidable challenge of navigating diverse time zones and other logistical issues, I am encouraged that we successfully convened two sets of substantive discussions which helped set our collective agenda and now guide our work in 2021.

At the time of writing, we cannot predict how, when and to what extent international in-person activities will be possible in the current year. The Elders will remain flexible and vigilant in their defence of global cooperation and justice. Whatever form the global recovery takes, it is essential that it is rooted in the values of peace, justice and human rights.

**David Nussbaum**  
Chief Executive

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**COVID-19 changed the context in which The Elders works... Whatever form the global recovery takes, it is essential that it is rooted in the values of peace, justice and human rights.**

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# THE ELDERS' VISION AND WORK

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The Elders was founded in 2007 by Nelson Mandela to “support courage where there is fear, foster agreement where there is conflict and inspire hope where there is despair”.

Charged with this mandate, the Elders use their independence, collective experience and influence to work for peace, justice and human rights worldwide. Working both publicly and through private diplomacy, they engage with global leaders and civil society to resolve conflict and address its root causes, to challenge injustice, and to promote ethical leadership and good governance.

The organisation’s collective identity is strongly rooted in the mandate bestowed by Mandela, years of collective endeavour and a shared sense of mission and values. The Elders’ independence and integrity are fundamental, enabling them to speak freely and boldly, working both publicly and behind the scenes to help tackle complex and seemingly intractable issues.

The Elders’ role is often catalytic: they create space for others whose causes are aligned with their vision for a better future, and aim to strengthen the voices of emerging leaders with integrity.

The Elders also seek to give a voice to some of those who are voiceless, for example through sharing their experiences publicly when they hear directly from marginalised people about the consequences of conflict or other failures of leadership, or bringing those stories into international forums.

The Elders’ range of approaches to their work has included:

- o **International travel (country visits, speaking at international conferences, holding high-level and grassroots meetings)**
- o **participation in virtual international events and meetings**
- o **Letters sent privately, sometimes with a public statement issued in parallel**
- o **Private discussions with government and other leaders**
- o **Convening or co-hosting meetings and events with select public audiences**
- o **Public statements, often with follow-up media work, opinion pieces, blogs or interviews.**



Photo: The Elders / Ralph Alswang

## ELDERS' MISSION AND STRATEGIC PLAN

The 2018-22 Strategic Framework has been designed to provide institutional coherence to ongoing policy and communications activities.

The Elders' Strategic Framework is arranged around three key themes:

- o **Governance and Leadership**
- o **Conflict, its Causes and Consequences**
- o **Inequality, Exclusion and Injustice**

Under the umbrella of these three themes, The Elders focus on six programmes of work.

- o **Ethical Leadership and Multilateral Cooperation**
- o **Conflict Countries and Regions**
- o **Climate Change**
- o **Refugees and Migration**
- o **Universal Health Coverage**
- o **Access to Justice**

Many of the issues on which The Elders work cannot neatly be contained within one theme, but encompass elements of two or all three. The Elders favour a holistic approach which considers all the diverse aspects to any geopolitical problem, and includes the range of relevant stakeholders when trying to arrive at a sustainable outcome. In particular, equality for women and girls is a theme through every area of our work. We also seek to empower young people and promote intergenerational dialogue to arrive at sustainable solutions for current and future generations.

One comparative advantage of the group is that its members represent no vested interest and are free from national or institutional influence. The Elders can "speak truth to power" from a genuinely objective standpoint, and use their position to amplify the voices of marginalised and disempowered groups, particularly victims of conflict and discrimination.

More information about all the work of The Elders, can be found online at:  
[www.theelders.org/what-we-do](http://www.theelders.org/what-we-do)



REVIEW OF PROGRAMMATIC INITIATIVES

# ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

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## NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

### **IMPACT HIGHLIGHT:**

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Elders' involvement adds extra weight, salience and media resonance to Doomsday Clock announcement

The Elders' authority and credibility on nuclear issues was underscored in January 2020 when Mary Robinson and Ban Ki-moon were invited to participate in the unveiling of the "Doomsday Clock" in Washington DC. This is the highest-profile public event for nuclear policy in the world and always attracts considerable media attention. The 2020 event was particularly significant because the "hands" of the clock were moved to 100 seconds to midnight by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, representing the highest danger level since the Clock was first unveiled in 1947. The two Elders participated in the "unveiling" ceremony alongside former Governor



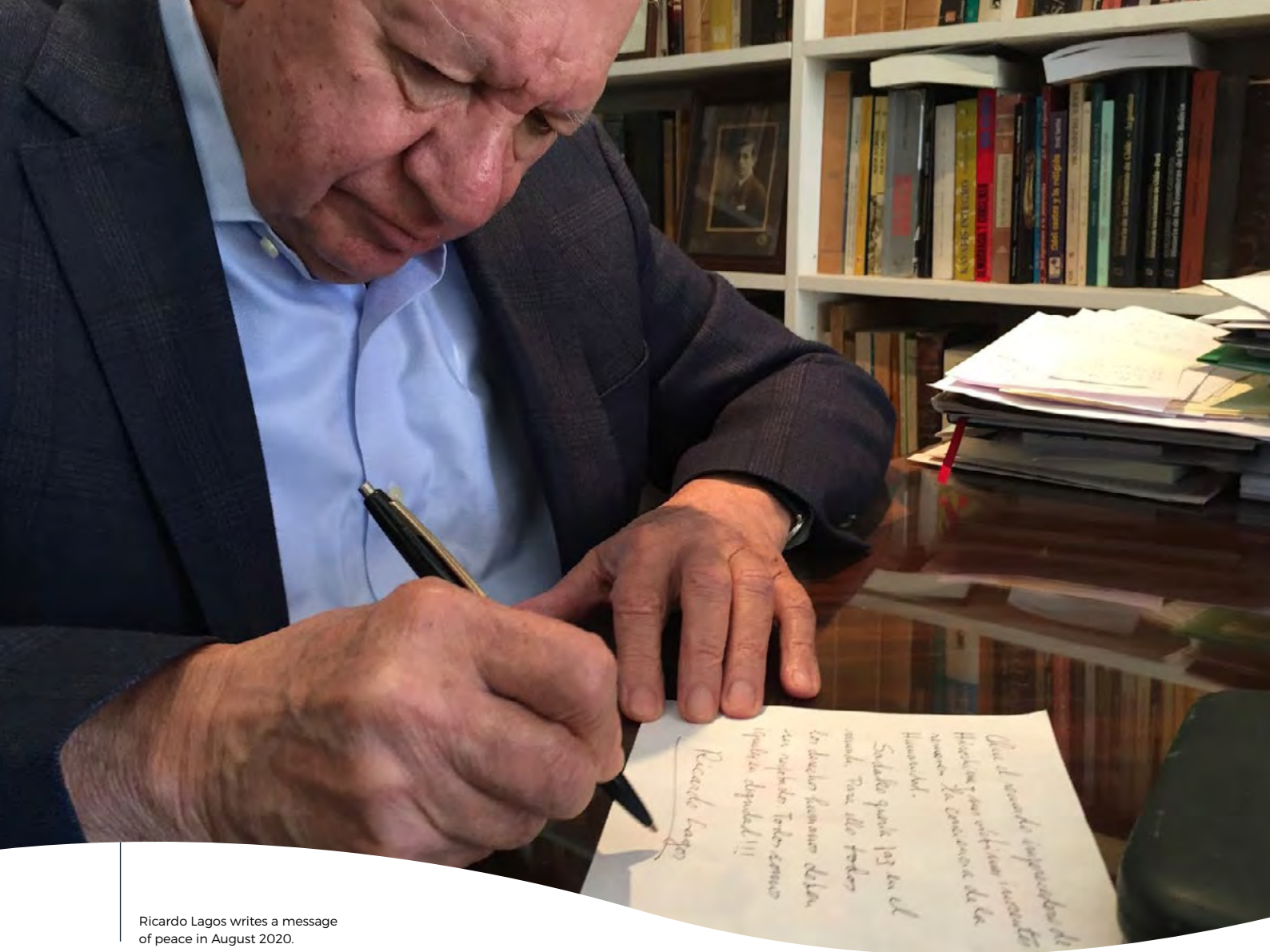


of California Jerry Brown, and undertook several media and public events including a discussion at the Brookings Institution on climate risks. They also held meetings in Washington DC with senior State Department officials working on arms control and disarmament issues. The Elders' participation in the 2020 unveiling generated 900 media articles referencing the group on the day of the announcement, an unprecedented level for an Elders' event, with a combined potential reach of 1.5 billion people.

The nuclear threat was also high on the agenda at the Munich Security Conference in February 2020, which marked the last significant physical series of meetings the Elders would collectively hold before the COVID-19 pandemic curtailed global travel and gatherings. The Elders' delegation discussed the state of global disarmament talks

with Lassina Zerbo, the Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), and met Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif for talks on how to ease security tensions and promote dialogue following the US assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani the previous month. Ban Ki-moon also used a keynote speech at the Technische Universität München to urge the United States to agree to extend the New START arms control treaty – a message all Elders would continue to repeat throughout the year.

Although the restrictions imposed to combat COVID-19 meant the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference was postponed until 2021, Elders remained seized by the urgency of the need to make multilateral progress on nuclear disarmament.



Ricardo Lagos writes a message of peace in August 2020.

In July, the Elders sent letters to the leaders of the five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council (the 'P5'), calling on them to show leadership in taking practical steps to reduce the threat of nuclear conflict. The Chinese and Russian Governments sent positive responses to the letters to Presidents Xi and Putin, expressing support for the ideas suggested by the Elders of convening a P5 leaders' meeting on nuclear arms control and for arranging a joint P5 statement declaring that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought".

Ban Ki-moon published an op-ed in the South China Morning Post in June 2020, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, to encourage all P5 states – including China – to be proactive on disarmament; a message he repeated in a virtual address to the UN Security Council in August on the challenges of peacemaking amid a global pandemic.

The cancellation of the Elders' planned physical board meeting in Japan due to the pandemic meant that plans to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki migrated to the digital realm. Inspired by the story of Hiroshima victim Sadako Sasaki and her family, several Elders made origami "peace cranes" which were shared across social media as part of a digital awareness-raising campaign. The Secretariat collaborated with the Hiroshima Prefecture, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and a number of other civil society groups around the world to amplify these digital messages of peace and remembrance, generating a warm and wide response online, including the UN's Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu. Ban Ki-moon published an op-ed in TIME magazine on the significance of the anniversaries, and also participated in a high-level online panel discussion on 9 August 2020 – the

“ **May the everlasting memory of Hiroshima and its innocent victims rekindle the conscience of humanity. We are all equal in dignity!**

Ricardo Lagos' message of peace, August 2020.



anniversary of the Nagasaki bombing – alongside Ms. Nakamitsu, the Vice-President of the ICRC, the Executive Director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and the Mayor of Nagasaki. Mary Robinson was also interviewed by BBC radio to explain the Elders' policy objectives on nuclear minimisation, and the symbolic importance of the peace cranes.

2020 ended with the election of Joe Biden as President of the United States. The Elders used their statement of congratulations to encourage the new Administration to re-engage with multilateral disarmament negotiations, with an extension of New START seen as the top priority, and were encouraged to see that agreement to extend New START for a further five years was reached in January 2021.





UN Photo / Mark Garten

## UN AND P5 ENGAGEMENT

The 75th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations in June 2020 was a key moment for The Elders to promote their new policy position paper on the future of multilateralism. In January, Mary Robinson outlined its key themes in an address to the UN Security Council, and in private meetings with the Permanent Representatives of the five Permanent Members.

COVID-19 gave even more impetus to the need to reform the multilateral system, and it was through this prism that the Elders' report was published and promoted in June to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter.

*"Hope for a Sea-Change: Why Multilateralism Must Reshape The World After COVID-19"* was the product of a process of deliberations by The Elders on how the UN and the multilateral system in general should respond to the existential threats of nuclear weapons, climate change and pandemics, as well as the malign impact of nationalistic political populism.

The paper was launched by Mary Robinson at a UN session of the Federation of Small States (FOSS)

### IMPACT HIGHLIGHT:

Mary Robinson and Ban Ki-moon address UN Security Council on conflict, collaboration and existential threats

and widely circulated among diplomatic missions, media and civil society. It attracted considerable media interest, with op-eds published by Ban Ki-moon in the South China Morning Post and Ernesto Zedillo in El Pais, together with interviews with Gro Brundtland in the New York Times and Lakhdar Brahimi in Le Monde.

South China Morning Post

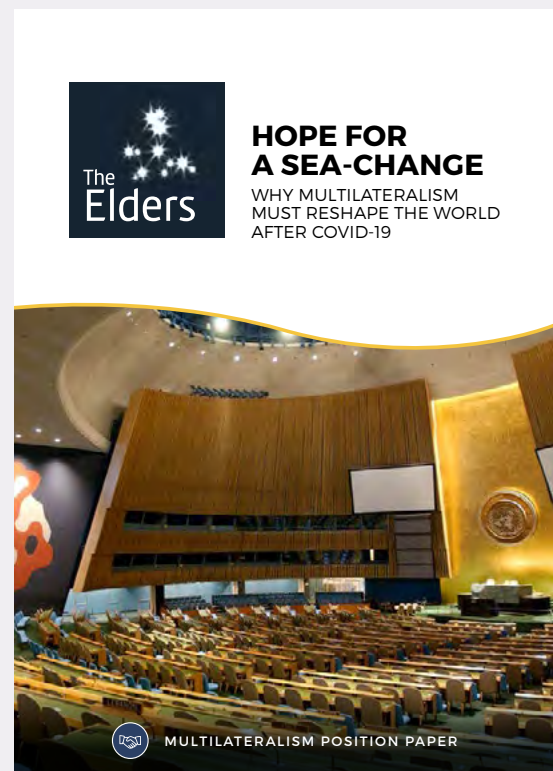
# “Nuclear proliferation needs a multilateral response just as much as the coronavirus pandemic”

Ban Ki-Moon, June 2020

As part of the wider UN75 commemorations, Gro Brundtland, Ban Ki-moon, Mary Robinson, Graça Machel, Juan Manuel Santos and Hina Jilani all took part in the UN75 Global Governance Forum in September, during what would normally have been the UNGA High Level Week. This series of interactive online dialogues afforded another opportunity to promote the Elders’ messages on multilateralism and hear from young activists and other grassroots representatives on the challenges posed by COVID-19 and other threats to global peace and stability.

Throughout the year the Elders remained in close contact with the UN leadership and offered vocal support for the “global ceasefire” call by Secretary-General António Guterres, including in an address to the Security Council by Ban Ki-moon in August 2020. This dialogue will continue into 2021 as the UN canvasses opinions from civil society, building on the ‘UN at 75’ and ‘Together First’ initiatives, on how to further improve and reform its governance structures to become more open, accountable and effective.

All of the Elders also signed an open letter to G20 leaders initiated by former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown, calling for greater leadership and economic coordination in the face of the pandemic, especially regarding debt relief and



other forms of financial support and burden-sharing for countries in the Global South. The letter was published in Project Syndicate and received widespread media coverage worldwide.



Indigenous women protest for social justice, in Brazil. (Photo by Natalia Comes / Cobertura Colaborativa)



## CLIMATE CHANGE

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The Elders were determined that the climate crisis would not fall off the global agenda in 2020 amid the demands of pandemic prevention and response. Throughout the year they maintained their advocacy and engagement, despite the postponement of the COP 26 summit in Glasgow from November 2020 to November 2021.

This included a continuing focus on ending the use and financing of fossil fuels, with targeted op-eds in countries such as Germany and Canada urging governments to show responsible leadership and align trade and export policies with climate goals. In July, Mary Robinson published a commentary in the Canadian paper *The Globe and Mail* warning that Canada's reputation as a leader on ambitious climate action was at risk. The piece condemned plans to expand the Vista coal mine in Alberta province. Canada's Environment Minister had

### IMPACT HIGHLIGHT:

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Mary Robinson's op-ed in Canada helps pressure government to change stance on coal mine expansion

THE GLOBE AND MAIL\*

## “Canada can lead on climate change, if leaders match words with deeds”

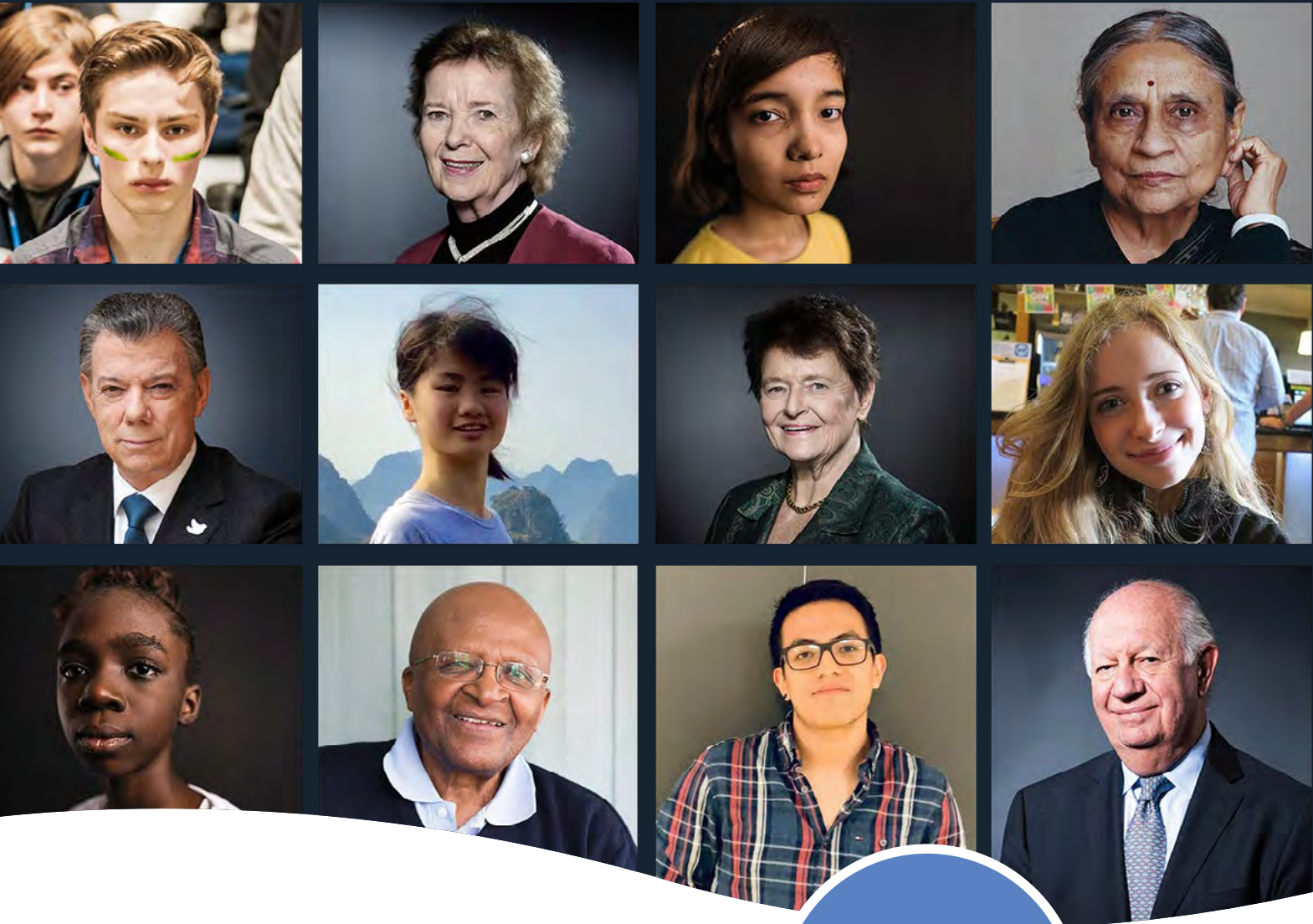
Mary Robinson, July 2020

previously signalled that he did not intend to order a federal review of the expansion, in the absence of international pressure. On the same day as the publication of Mary Robinson’s op-ed however, a review was ordered; this intervention by The Elders was credited by partners as being helpful in changing the overall debate.

A particular emphasis was placed upon the United Kingdom as the host of COP 26. In both private and public outreach, the Elders called on the UK to show an engaged, collaborative and internationalist outlook, especially following the country’s departure from the European Union. In an open letter to Prime Minister Boris Johnson published in The Times in October, the Elders urged him to demonstrate sustained leadership on a scale comparable to the successful outcome of the COP 21 negotiations in Paris in 2015. The letter



was covered in news stories by the Independent and Business Green, and the UK’s top climate diplomats Nick Bridges and John Murton both shared the article on social media. On 4 December, the Prime Minister announced a target of a 68% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, compared to 1990 levels, by 2030.



Beyond the diplomatic sphere, The Elders supported youth activists in their own advocacy efforts. To mark the 50th anniversary of the first “Earth Day” gathering in 1970, ten climate youth leaders published guest blogs on The Elders’ website highlighting different aspects of the climate crisis and its intersections with other systemic problems such as inequality, gender discrimination, racism and poverty. Elders responded directly to specific blogs as part of a digital intergenerational dialogue, which was greatly appreciated by the young activists and the wider climate community as a source of solidarity, mentoring and mutual learning. As one young leader said: *“The Elders have real authenticity and that is why I and we trust them. Intergenerational dialogue like this is exactly what is needed, and I really love this opportunity.”*

In November the Elders welcomed the ratification by Mexico of the landmark Escazú Agreement, meaning it could now come into force as a legally-binding agreement across Latin America and the Caribbean. This is the first legally binding regional environmental and human rights agreement designed to ensure rights to environmental information, public participation in environmental decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters.





**Jennifer Morgan** @climatemorgan

Scottish climate activist, @erinmarysoo, calls on the international community to work together, as it is in response to #COVID19, to create a more just and sustainable future.

Great blog series hosted by @TheElders on how young people are tackling the #ClimateEmergency.

**The Elders** @TheElders · May 15, 2020  
 "#COVID19 illustrates the real potential of what united #climateaction could achieve." - @erinmarysoo  
 theelders.org/news/covid-19-...

Today, Gro Harlem Brundtland champions Erin's blog on the importance of youth participation in building a just and sustainable future. #FridaysForFuture

9:48 AM · May 15, 2020 · Twitter Web App

As G20 leaders and others pledged to “build back better” from COVID-19, the Elders emphasised the importance of a green recovery that is fully aligned with the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. This was the key message of a public event organised in December 2020 to mark the fifth anniversary of the Paris Agreement, in collaboration with Project Syndicate and the European Investment Bank. Mary Robinson, Gro Brundtland and Ban Ki-moon all participated in this high-profile online event alongside former US climate negotiator Todd Stern, former UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres and former Governor of California Jerry Brown. Elders’ messages were amplified across Project Syndicate’s global editorial network and useful contacts were developed with key financial institutions in Europe, North America and China as a result.



Photo of Lakhdar Brahimi.  
Photo: Gordon Welters / The Elders.



## CONFLICT COUNTRIES AND REGIONS

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COVID-19 necessarily constrained the capacity for country visits during 2020 but the Elders continued to focus on key global conflicts, with an emphasis on respect for international law, gender inclusivity and human rights as the cornerstones of peacebuilding.

Ban Ki-moon met the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, in Riyadh in February, to discuss regional tensions with Iran and also Saudi Arabia's position regarding the new approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict being developed by President Trump.

Alarmed by persistent unilateral moves by the Trump Administration to undermine the principles and prospects of a two-state solution to the conflict, Elders used media statements and op-eds to reassert the importance of UN resolutions and universal human rights as the only basis for achieving a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The Elders were particularly concerned by the plans mooted by Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to unilaterally "annex" swathes of the occupied West Bank. They wrote to the heads of state of the five permanent members of the

UN Security Council and other leaders, urging them to press Israel to abstain from such a move, receiving substantive replies from key world leaders that underscored their agreement with the Elders' concerns. Juan Manuel Santos also directly addressed the Israeli public via an op-ed in the newspaper Haaretz that was published in both English and Hebrew.

Alongside this political advocacy, The Elders also showed their support for and solidarity with human rights defenders and civil society organisations in both Israel and Palestine, both of whom faced an increasingly hostile political environment. This ongoing support for the voices on the frontline was encapsulated in a video discussion between Gro Brundtland and Nadav Weiman from Israeli human rights NGO Breaking The Silence – a revealing account of the complexities of the conflict that was shared widely on social media.

Together with The Carter Center, between June and November 2020 The Elders convened four online dialogue workshops with Palestinian civil society groups from the West Bank, Gaza, Israel within its 1967 borders, and the diaspora.

HAARETZ

**“In Colombia, it took courage to make peace. I worry Israel is choosing conflict, instead”**

Juan Manuel Santos, July 2020

## **IMPACT HIGHLIGHT:**

Lakhdar Brahimi convenes private dialogues with The Carter Center for Israeli and Palestinian activists to discuss human rights and prospects for peace

Lakhdar Brahimi represented The Elders on each occasion, and Hina Jilani joined for the session with Palestinian citizens of Israel. The aim of the workshops was to stimulate debate and for Elders to listen to grassroots perspectives amid increasing fragmentation and alienation in the Palestinian national movement. A similar event was also organised with Israeli human rights and peace activists, who face vilification and ostracism within their own society but also struggle to find willing interlocutors on the Palestinian side given the political impasse.

The Elders also continued to support civil society in Zimbabwe, building on their country visits in

2018 and 2019 and shining a light on the country's ongoing travails, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and repressive practices by state authorities.

As part of efforts to promote women's inclusion in peacebuilding in the Arab world, in October 2020, the Elders convened a three-day virtual meeting in collaboration with Wilton Park, supported by UN Women and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, which brought together 60 female mediators, government officials and peacebuilding experts from different countries and generations to assess the obstacles and opportunities. The Elders drew on the experience of the convening to inform their support for UN Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security as they marked its 20th Anniversary in October. They called on women mediators to build further links across borders, share experiences and establish mentorship, networks, and intergenerational dialogue.

In September 2020, Mary Robinson and Gro Brundtland held video talks with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on global conflict risks and the imperative for progress on nuclear disarmament, particularly regarding the need to extend the New START agreement between the US and Russia.

Despite the absence of travel and physical meetings, The Elders deepened their relations with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) following the online collaboration to mark the Hiroshima and Nagasaki anniversaries.



Photo: UNHCR / Roger Arnold



## REFUGEES AND MIGRATION

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The health and human rights crises afflicting refugees and migrants were a constant area of concern for The Elders in 2020, predating the COVID-19 pandemic but given added impetus as the pandemic took hold and often diverted attention and resources away from marginalised groups.

In April, Zeid Raad Al Hussein published an op-ed in Washington-based website The Hill which drew attention to the health and humanitarian crisis on the US-Mexico border because of the US administration's treatment of detained migrants, and highlighted the particular dangers of this in the context of COVID-19. This was timed to coincide with a legal challenge to the detention of child migrants in the context of the pandemic and was well received by academics and civil society groups working on the issue.

### IMPACT HIGHLIGHT:

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Ban Ki-moon's op-ed on Rohingya refugees sparked interest among ASEAN stakeholders after amplification by the UN refugee agency

**THE  
HILL**

## “Migrants’ rights and health must be protected in the face of COVID-19”

Zeid Raad Al Hussein, September 2020

In response to the plight of several hundred displaced Rohingya left adrift in the Bay of Bengal, Ban Ki-moon published an op-ed for the Thomson Reuters Foundation on the need for responsibility-sharing across ASEAN states to rescue the Rohingya refugees from the sea. His message was well received by regional stakeholders and amplified by UNHCR on their social media channels.

Mary Robinson also used World Refugee Day in June as an opportunity to publish another op-ed for Thomson Reuters to argue for global solidarity and support, praising the decision by Portugal’s Prime Minister to grant temporary citizenship to migrants so they could access essential healthcare services during the COVID-19 pandemic.





Photo: UN Women/  
Pathumporn Thongking



## UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

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The Elders' work on UHC was given fresh urgency and impetus due to the pandemic. Three members of the organisation were directly involved in the international community's response to COVID-19 and efforts to improve future policy and governance frameworks: Gro Brundtland via her role as co-Chair of the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (which had warned of the dangers of a global pandemic in its inaugural report of September 2019); Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as co-Chair and Ernesto Zedillo as panel member of the newly-established Independent Panel on Pandemic Preparedness and Response.

This illustrates the stature of the Elders individually and collectively within global health policy, and affords fresh platforms for conveying core messages on the indispensability of Universal Health Coverage to a sustainable post-pandemic recovery, in addition to op-eds, speeches and online panel events.

### IMPACT HIGHLIGHT:

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Elders take on prominent leadership roles with the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board and the Independent Panel on Pandemic Preparedness and Response

“ **Compassionate leadership and solidarity must lie at the heart of all future efforts: from vaccine distribution to putting vulnerable groups’ needs at the heart of public health.**

Gro Harlem Brundtland, December 2020

Elders were also invited to participate in a further independent review of COVID-19 responses undertaken by the Government of Japan and Chatham House, in recognition of their authority on UHC.

A key policy position of The Elders is that health services should be provided free of charge. This is now becoming more accepted in the international health care policy debate, especially in light of the pandemic. In a significant move in 2020, the World Health Organization put out policy advice that countries should remove healthcare user fees in tackling COVID-19, a call reiterated by the Director-General. The Secretariat has remained in close contact with the WHO throughout the year and has received messages of appreciation from the WHO leadership about the Elders’ support for UHC throughout the pandemic period. Elders have also taken part in public health information campaigns online to stress essential, simple steps that citizens can take to protect their health, such as regular hand-washing.

To mark UHC Day on 12 December, the Elders published a new report – “Building Back Better for Universal Health” – emphasising the indispensable role UHC must play in post-pandemic health and economic recovery plans. Gro Brundtland and



Graça Machel presented the report at a high-level online panel event organised by the WHO and the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, and it was widely shared on social media across the global health community.



Photo: Skoll Foundation



## ACCESS TO JUSTICE

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Throughout 2020, the Elders used their profile and convening power to raise the salience of justice issues in the global debate on pandemic response.

Hina Jilani and Graça Machel contributed forewords to two important reports on access to justice and COVID-19, which helped ensure they reached a wider and politically influential audience.

In May, Graça Machel also published an op-ed in *The Guardian* highlighting the growing and alarming rise in violence against women as a consequence of the lockdowns and other restrictions, calling on states to invest both in protection for women, and education to change attitudes in society at large.

### IMPACT HIGHLIGHT:

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Graça Machel highlights rise of violence against women amid COVID-19 lockdowns in *Guardian* op-ed



The  
Guardian

## “COVID-19 has gifted us a chance to end gender-based violence. We must take it”

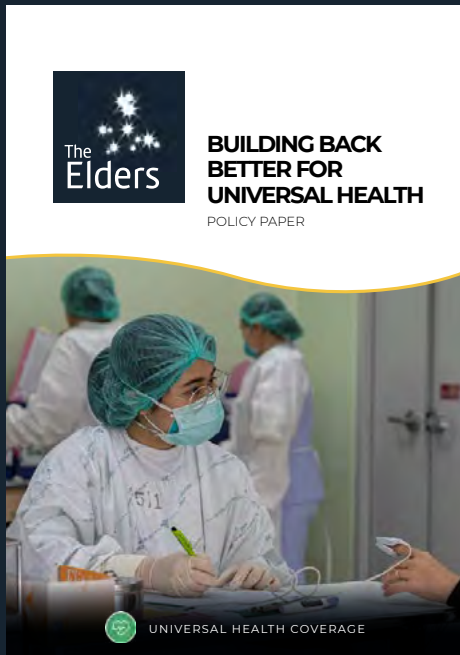
Graça Machel, May 2020

In July, Mary Robinson contributed a video message to the online launch event of the new COVID-19 Grassroots Justice Fund, which aims to raise at least US\$1 million to provide critical funding to 100 grassroots justice groups to enable them to continue to deliver essential justice services as part of the COVID-19 response and recovery.

In November, Ban Ki-moon gave a keynote address at the virtual annual conference of the International Bar Association. As well as highlighting the grassroots needs of justice defenders, he also condemned sustained attacks on democratic safeguards, human rights and the rule of law in many countries where COVID-19 has been used as an excuse to roll back protections.

This fundamental connection between justice and human rights was also the emphasis of the ‘16 Days of Activism’ online campaign in November-December 2020, organised on a global basis by UN Women. As in previous years, The Elders lent their support to this digital campaign and offered a platform to grassroots women’s groups, justice defenders and advocacy champions via guest blogs on their website and social media engagement.





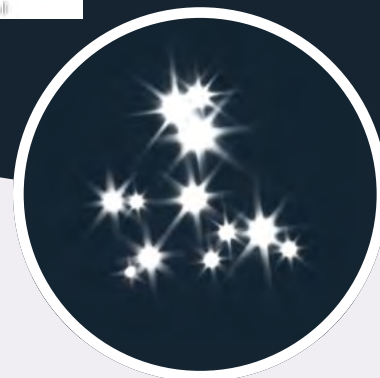
# COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

The constraints and imperatives of the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound influence on The Elders' communications activities in 2020.

Most significantly, the absence of physical meetings and travel meant digital engagement became ever more important. The Elders' collaboration on the "Finding Humanity" podcast marked a significant development in our digital outreach, with Mary Robinson, Gro Brundtland, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Juan Manuel Santos and Zeid Raad Al Hussein all joining discussions on peace, justice, human rights and multilateralism in the context of the pandemic.

## IMPACT HIGHLIGHT:

The Finding Humanity podcast allowed the Elders to provide thought leadership during a time of unprecedented global challenges





The podcasts and associated communications on social media reached a global target audience and helped boost the Elders' collective profile in an ever-crowded digital media landscape.

The overall number of website page views increased 36% compared with the previous year at 487,000 page views.

235,000 new users visited the Elders' website over the same period. This is a 59% increase on the same period last year.

In 2020, there was a 53% increase in organic engagement with The Elders' Twitter content, compared with the previous year (14.3 million impressions and 284,000 engagements including retweets, likes, and comments). @TheElders also welcomed over 6,500 new followers during the year.



# FINANCIAL REVIEW

FOR THE YEAR TO  
31 DECEMBER 2020

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## Income

The Elders' income for the year was £3.0 million (2019: £3.3 million). This includes £0.12 million (2019: £0.08 million) of restricted funding used for our Programmatic work. All restricted income was fully expended during the year.

## Expenditure

The Elders' expenditure for the year was £2.6 million (2019: £3.2 million). This relates primarily to the delivery of a global programme of activities agreed by the Elders, supported by a Secretariat based in London. The Secretariat provides the Elders with policy research, conducts advocacy and communications work, and is responsible for logistics and other support activities. Expenditure was less than the previous year due mainly to the impact of the pandemic restricting international travel.

## Reserves

The approach of The Elders is to maintain sufficient available reserves to enable normal operating activities to continue for a period of time, should a shortfall in income or unexpected expenditure occur, taking account of potential risks that may arise - the policy is to maintain available reserves sufficient to meet at least 12 months' normal operating expenditure. Any future surpluses will be directed to meet the 12 months target.

Reserves at the end of 2020, all unrestricted, were £3.1 million (2019: £2.7 million), of which £0.3 million were represented by fixed assets, leaving available reserves of £2.8 million which represents about 10 months' normal operating expenditure. This is less than the amount determined by the reserves policy described above.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the more difficult fundraising environment will present challenges for realising the organisation's income aspirations in 2021. Whilst lower travel costs will go some way to offsetting any deficit in income, the organisation may have to draw on some of its reserves. A significant proportion of the income anticipated for 2021 has been received during the first quarter, which underpins the financial resilience of the organisation. Unrestricted income of £0.4 million is contracted for 2021 and at least a further £0.9 million anticipated. The costs of the Secretariat are under £3 million per annum.

### **Carbon-offsetting**

The Elders have partnered with UK-based charity Climate Stewards to offset the carbon emissions generated by business flights. For 2020, The Elders donated £1,787 to Carbon Stewards, based on total flight emissions of 89 tonnes CO<sup>2</sup>. Carbon Stewards will use these funds across its portfolio of community-based projects in Kenya, Uganda, Ghana and Mexico. These projects include tree-growing schemes in schools, fuel-efficient cooking stoves and water filter construction, and all are designed to reduce carbon emissions in a sustainable, inclusive way for the benefit of local communities.

**THE ELDERS FOUNDATION STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES  
(Incorporating the Income and Expenditure Account)  
YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2020**

|   | 2020         | 2019         |
|---|--------------|--------------|
|   | £000         | £000         |
| <b>INCOME FROM:</b>                     |              |              |
| Donations and grants                    |              |              |
| - General                               | 2,845        | 3,174        |
| - Project funding                       | 128          | 84           |
| Interest income                         | 9            | 11           |
| Other                                   | 1            | -            |
| <b>TOTAL INCOME</b>                     | <b>2,983</b> | <b>3,269</b> |
| <b>EXPENDITURE ON:</b>                  |              |              |
| Raising funds                           | 306          | 333          |
| Charitable activities                   |              |              |
| Ethical Leadership                      | 426          | 678          |
| Climate Change                          | 641          | 555          |
| Conflict Countries and Regions          | 367          | 529          |
| Refugees and Migration                  | 193          | 270          |
| Universal Health Coverage               | 172          | 312          |
| Access to Justice                       | 461          | 571          |
| Total charitable activities expenditure | 2,259        | 2,915        |
| <b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>                | <b>2,566</b> | <b>3,248</b> |
| Net income and net movement in funds    | 417          | 21           |
| Fund balances brought forward           | 2,745        | 2,724        |
| <b>FUND BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD</b>    | <b>3,162</b> | <b>2,745</b> |

**THE ELDERS FOUNDATION BALANCE SHEET  
AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2020**

|   | 2020         | 2019         |
|---|--------------|--------------|
|   | £000         | £000         |
| <b>FIXED ASSETS</b>                                     |              |              |
| Tangible assets   | 347          | 400          |
| <b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>                                   |              |              |
| Debtors   | 329          | 370          |
| Short term deposit                                      | 1,105        | 500          |
| Cash at bank and in hand                                | 2,234        | 1,961        |
| <b>TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS</b>                             | <b>3,668</b> | <b>2,831</b> |
| Creditors: amounts falling due within one year          | (654)        | (255)        |
| <b>NET CURRENT ASSETS</b>                               | <b>3,014</b> | <b>2,576</b> |
| <b>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>            | <b>3,363</b> | <b>2,976</b> |
| Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year | (149)        | (231)        |
| Provision for liabilities                               | (50)         | -            |
| <b>TOTAL FUNDS (All funds unrestricted)</b>             | <b>3,162</b> | <b>2,745</b> |

**The Elders are grateful to the members of the Advisory Council, whose support and advice enables them to carry out their work.**

**Richard Branson**  
Virgin Unite

**Peter Gabriel**  
The Peter Gabriel Trust

**Jeremy Collier**  
Jeremy Collier Foundation

**Don Gips**  
Skoll Foundation

**Srik Gopal**  
Humanity United

**Lisa Harris**

**Dorine Manson**  
Dutch Postcode Lottery

**Randy Newcomb**  
Omidyar Group

**Jean Oelwang**  
Virgin Unite

**Mabel van Oranje**  
Girls Not Brides

**Sally Osberg**

**Shannon Sedgwick Davis**  
Bridgeway Foundation

**Jeff Skoll**  
Skoll Foundation

**Lulit Solomon**  
Jeremy Collier Foundation

**Amy Towers**  
The Nduna Foundation

The Elders are also grateful to all those who provided generous support in 2020, including:

- Caldera Foundation
- Chandra Jessee, InMaat Foundation
- Charles Stewart, Mott Foundation
- Ploughshares Fund
- Julie Quadrio Curzio



**“ 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 2007, Founder of The Elders



**theElders.org**

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#### **The Elders Foundation**

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