

Religious and traditional practices discriminate against women and girls

Thursday 2 July 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Elders – a group of eminent global leaders brought together by Nelson Mandela – have called on men and boys – and particularly religious and traditional leaders – to change harmful and discriminatory practices against women and girls and give their full support to the realisation of equality for all.

To mark the launch of this initiative, The Elders have issued a formal statement of their views:

“Religion and tradition are a great force for peace and progress around the world.

However, as Elders, we believe that the justification of discrimination against women and girls on grounds of religion or tradition, as if it were prescribed by a higher authority, is unacceptable.

We believe that women and girls share equal rights with men and boys in all aspects of life.

We call upon all leaders to promote and protect equal rights for women and girls.

We especially call on religious and traditional leaders to set an example and change all discriminatory practices within their own religions and traditions.

The Elders are fully committed to the realisation of equality and empowerment of all women and girls.”

Video messages from the Elders, available on their new website, discuss the effect of discrimination on women and girls – with special emphasis on the role of traditional and religious practices.

Jimmy Carter, former US President, describes religious practice as one of the **“basic causes of the violation of women’s rights. This example set by religious leaders gives an excuse to other dominant males to persecute or abuse or deprive women of their justifiable rights.”**

Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the former Brazilian President says – **“the idea that God is behind discrimination is unacceptable.”**

Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and former President of Ireland, articulates the effect that religion and tradition can have on women’s lives: **“They are submissive.. .to be well thought of by God they must accept their role. This goes on to more difficult issues like female genital mutilation... traditional leaders reinforce this harmful traditional practice by saying this is our culture. It’s not culture – it’s harmful traditional practice.”**

Lakhdar Brahimi, former Algerian Foreign Minister, speaks movingly about discrimination in his own family: his sisters were not sent to school. But he has also seen big changes within a generation. **“Discrimination for me is not something abstract...it is very concrete and very personal. I see the result of discrimination very close to myself.”**

Desmond Tutu, chair of the Elders, issues a powerful message to men and boys on ending violence against women: **“You are a weak man if you use your physical superiority to assault and brutalise women. A society that permits violence against women is a society that is on the way out.”**

Visit the new Elders website to view the Elders’ videos and read more about this initiative: www.theElders.org

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