

Jimmy Carter says religion used to subjugate women

July 17, 2009

ATLANTA (ABP) — Former President Jimmy Carter has urged religious leaders to repudiate teachings that he says justify cruelty to women.

Carter, a Nobel laureate and 39th president of the United States, described in an [article](#) in the British newspaper *The Observer* his "painful and difficult" [decision](#) in 2000 to leave the Southern Baptist Convention after six decades.

Carter, who teaches Sunday school at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., said the decision became "unavoidable" when SBC leaders adopted a new consensus faith statement "quoting a few carefully selected Bible verses and claiming that Eve was created second to Adam and was responsible for original sin, ordained that women must be 'subservient' to their husbands and prohibited from serving as deacons, pastors or chaplains in the military service."



Jimmy Carter

Carter said that went against his belief "that we are all equal in the eyes of God."

Writing on behalf of a group of world leaders convened by Nelson Mandela called the Elders, Carter said viewing women as inferior to men is not

limited to one religion and is not confined to the walls of the church, mosque or synagogue.

"This discrimination, unjustifiably attributed to a Higher Authority, has provided a reason or excuse for the deprivation of women's equal rights across the world for centuries," he said. "The male interpretations of religious texts and the way they interact with, and reinforce, traditional practices justify some of the most pervasive, persistent, flagrant and damaging examples of human rights abuses."

At its worst, Carter said the belief is used to justify slavery, violence, forced prostitution, genital mutilation and national laws that omit rape as a crime. But he said discriminatory thinking is also behind the continuing gender pay gap and why so few women hold public office in Britain and the U.S.

"It is simply self-defeating for any community to discriminate against half its population," Carter wrote. "We need to challenge these self-serving and out-dated attitudes and practices — as we are seeing in Iran where women are at the forefront of the battle for democracy and freedom."

Carter acknowledged that some New Testament teachings can be used to support male superiority, but he countered that carefully selected Bible verses can also be used to defend slavery.

"The truth is that male religious leaders have had — and still have — an option to interpret holy teachings either to exalt or subjugate women," Carter said. "They have, for their own selfish ends, overwhelmingly chosen the latter."

Carters said the [Elders](#), an independent group of eminent global leaders bringing their collective influence and experience to support peace and human rights, were "calling on all leaders to challenge and change the harmful teachings and practices, no matter how ingrained, which justify discrimination against women."

He called on leaders of all religions to "acknowledge and emphasize the positive messages of dignity and equality that all the world's major faiths share."

Carter said religion that demeans women "provides the foundation or justification for much of the pervasive persecution and abuse of women throughout the world."

He said that violates not only the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "but also the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul, Moses and the prophets, Muhammad, and founders of other great religions — all of whom have called for proper and equitable treatment of all the children of God."

-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.