

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

## Grantham Institute Annual Lecture “Climate Justice: Why is it relevant in 2015?”

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When I served as President of Ireland from 1990 to 1997, nearly thirty years ago, we were a people about to embark on fast economic development, benefitting from the solidarity that came with being a member of the European Union. In fact when Ireland joined the EU in 1973, some parts of the country were considered “developing” including my beloved native county Mayo.

As President I led trade delegations to the United States, Japan, India and elsewhere as we attempted to attract investment, create decent jobs, build better health and education infrastructure – advance development.

What I didn’t have to do, was raise money to buy land on mainland Europe so our citizens could move there because the rising sea level was threatening our existence. What I didn’t have to do, either as President or as a constitutional lawyer, is to consider Ireland’s territorial sovereignty in light of the threats posed to our island by climate change. Yet this is what President Tong of the Republic of Kiribati is doing. He calls it “migration with dignity”.

In Geneva in early March, I participated on a panel at the Human Rights Council with President Tong. He described vividly the threat to his people’s very ability to remain on their islands posed by climate change. He has bought land in Fiji as a precaution, but if he has to move, what becomes of the identity, sovereignty and heritage of a small island people? I was struck by the fact that Eleanor Roosevelt and her Commission who drew up the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – a Declaration adopted by every country in the world – never imagined that human induced climate change might force whole countries to go out of existence.

Last September I attended the Third International Conference of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) on the island of Samoa. I have attended many UN conferences but this one was unusual in the extent to which it was 'owned' by the people of Samoa. They did everything they could to make it a success – from miles of bunting along the roads to welcome us and new planting to make the island more beautiful - to well managed meetings where everyone felt they had a voice.

The reason for the intense involvement was clear – looking at the brackish water as sea level is rising, and visiting the parts of the island affected by a recent cyclone, you could sense the reality of the immediate threat posed by climate change – and other small island states are even more vulnerable than Samoa.

The first point I would like to make, in giving the 2015 Annual Grantham Institute Lecture, is that we are not on course for a safe world for millions of people, and even more seriously for their children and grandchildren. We urgently need to change course and catalyse a transformation of the way we develop, the way we live and the way we do business. Our current system is flawed and unsustainable and if it continues the world is on course for catastrophic climate change and vast inequality.

Let's turn this on its head and make it a positive, because we now know there are better ways of doing things that could shape a more inclusive, equitable, sustainable and safe future for us all. The transformative change needed because of the impacts of climate is our opportunity to work for a much better and fairer world.

I am aware that I am speaking to an audience knowledgeable on all aspects of climate science and policy. I would like to talk to you about climate change from my perspective, one of justice, human rights and fairness, where people and their right to development are at the heart of the discussion. I do so with humility, because when I served as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1997 to 2002, climate change was not front of my mind. It was after that, when I led a small organisation called Realizing Rights, focused on economic and social rights in African countries that I saw first-hand the negative impacts

climate change was having on human rights including the right to food, the right to health, the right to development and the right to shelter.

It was not the science and the graphs or the pictures of polar bears on icecaps that brought me to climate change – it was the impacts it was having on peoples’ lives and peoples’ rights. I met farmers unable to produce a harvest because the growing seasons had become so unreliable and Heads of State in African countries unable to plan their infrastructure development because of the impacts of floods and storms. Everything seemed to be getting more difficult – despite the efforts to eradicate poverty and to make progress on the MDGs. Climate change was the added complicating factor.

In fact, for women in vulnerable situations, climate change impacts can be devastating. In many homes around the world, women are at the heart of the household's nexus of water, food, and energy – and thus often know first-hand about the challenges and potential solutions in these areas. In our conversations with women around the world, we hear about their struggles, but also their ideas, many of which, if applied, could facilitate change. Women are the most convincing advocates for the solutions that they need, so they should be at the forefront of decision-making which is why I champion women’s leadership in my work.

For me then climate change was never just a scientific or environmental issue – from my first experience it was about human rights and development; the threats climate change posed to rights and development and the adjustment climate action requires to our existing models of development. This is why my approach focuses on climate justice. It is motivated by the injustice of the impacts of climate change on the rights and opportunities of the people who are least responsible for causing the problem, and it is committed to making sure that the costs and the benefits of the transition away from fossil fuels are shared equitably. No one should be left behind as we make the transition – even if at present inequality is a characteristic of our world.

2015 is the year to catalyse a transformation – away from business as usual and to a more inclusive, sustainable and just alternative. This is because 2015 is the year the world agrees

on a new development agenda to succeed the Millennium Development Goals, a new legally binding climate agreement to avoid dangerous climate change and on the resources needed to implement both agendas on the ground in all countries.

Seeds sown in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 will blossom this year and then continue to grow in the years up to 2020, 2030, 2050 and beyond. Rio is the birth place of the international commitment to sustainable development and one product of the Earth Summit in 1992 was the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). From its origins the Climate Convention was an instrument of sustainable development, and not just as some perceive it, a narrowly focused multilateral environmental agreement. The commitments made to take action on climate change under the UNFCCC are critical to realising sustainable development.

Twenty years after the Earth Summit, in 2012, the world came together in Rio again to assess progress towards sustainable development and to determine next steps. The harsh reality emerged that no country had achieved sustainable development, inequality had grown, poverty remained a challenge despite the MDGs and the health of the planet and its ecosystems was deteriorating rapidly. From this realisation the idea for Sustainable Development Goals was born. These goals will be the successor to the MDGs – reorienting all development, in all countries, to be sustainable. This is a big deal – and part of the transformation to a different way of doing things.

To make the SDGs a reality they will need to be financed and implemented by each country in response to their national context and in cooperation with other countries. That is where the Financing for Development conference in Addis Ababa this July comes in – it is about making sure that resources are available to implement climate and sustainable development actions in all countries in a way that is fair and inclusive.

2015 is a significant milestone on our journey to a more sustainable model of development – and a potential catalyst for transformation to a different and I believe better way of living on planet earth. Key to maximising the change we can effect this year is to realise that the

2015 agendas are mutually reinforcing and translate at the country and community level into the same actions.

Unfortunately we have tended to work on climate change and development in siloes, with different communities of experts and separate policy agendas. The Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC<sup>1</sup> released last year refocused the climate community on the links between climate change and sustainable development. It reminds us that sustainable development is development that preserves the interests of future generations, that preserves the ecosystem services on which continued human flourishing depends, or that harmonizes economic, social, environmental development. It adds that *'the climate threat constrains possible development paths, and sufficiently disruptive climate change could preclude any prospect for a sustainable future. Thus, a stable climate is one component of Sustainable Development.'*

The Fifth Assessment Report also spells out the impacts climate change is having and will have on the enjoyment of human rights including the right to food, to water, to health and to shelter. These impacts on people and their rights are a significant motivation for urgent action on climate change and have been noted by the Human Rights Council in a series of Resolutions and most recently at a panel discussion on human rights and climate change in Geneva in March. The panel discussion focused on both the negative impacts of climate change on rights and the obligations of states to protect these rights, but also on the role human rights can play in informing effective climate actions and responses.

This connection between human rights and climate responses links to points made by the IPCC on synergies and trade-offs between climate responses and broader sustainable development goals, *'because some climate responses generate co-benefits for human and economic development, while others can have adverse side-effects and generate risks'*<sup>2</sup>. This acknowledges the potential risks to the right to development if climate action is not shared

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<sup>1</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: *The Fifth Assessment Report* (2014): <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/>

<sup>2</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: *The Fifth Assessment Report* (2014): <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/>

equitably and if support is not provided to developing countries to enable them to be part of the transition to climate resilient, low carbon development.

The latest science makes it clear that the world needs to reach zero carbon emissions by 2050 to maximise the chances of staying below 2°C. This is ambitious and a significant departure from the way we do business currently – but it is the only way to stay within the remaining carbon budget.

Research commissioned by my Foundation<sup>3</sup> looked at the equity and rights dimensions of the rapidly scaled up climate action needed to achieve this goal, while increasing adaptation action, as even 2°C of warming will result in significant climate impacts. The research found that the risks to human rights from scaled up climate action are manageable and considerably less than the risks posed by uncontrolled climate change. However, to reduce unintended negative impacts on human rights from climate action, our responses must be informed by human rights, and be fair, inclusive and participative to shape policies and actions that deliver for people and the planet.

It may seem contradictory – but to be fair all countries must be enabled to participate in the transition away from fossil fuels together and at the same time. If not we will exceed the carbon budget and consign countries without the means to participate in the transition to renewable energy, to a future based on expensive, obsolete and polluting fossil fuels. So creating the conditions, legal, regulatory, financial and political, for all countries to be part of the solution is key. This is where climate finance and finance for sustainable development can play a role in catalysing the transition which in turn needs to shift the trillions of dollars of investment worldwide to power the transformation.

The New Climate Economy Report<sup>4</sup> produced by the Calderon Commission of which Nick Stern is a member, finds that over the next 15 years, about US \$90 trillion will be invested in infrastructure in the world's cities, agriculture and energy. This gives the world an

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Robynson Foundation – Climate Justice: *Zero Carbon, Zero Poverty - The Climate Justice Way* (2015): <http://www.mrfcj.org/pdf/2015-02-05-Zero-Carbon-Zero-Poverty-the-Climate-Justice-Way.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The Global Commission on the Economy and Climate: *Better Growth, Better Climate: The New Climate Economy Report* (2014): <http://newclimateeconomy.report/>

unprecedented opportunity to drive investment in low-carbon growth, bringing multiple benefits to jobs, health, business productivity and quality of life. Like our work on Zero carbon Zero poverty<sup>5</sup>, the report finds that climate action and high quality growth are not just compatible, but that climate action is necessary for long term prosperity. Importantly the commission stresses that countries at all levels of income can seize these opportunities particularly if the 2015 processes send clear signals that we are departing from business as usual.

So what is required of the countries engaged in the international processes this year?

Leadership. Leadership by all countries and the leadership given will differ according to a country's circumstances. No matter how big or small a country's economy or population – all actions count and should be counted in the international effort. That is why both the climate agreement and the SDGs are universal. Climate change and other symptoms of unsustainable development confront us with the reality of our interdependence. No country alone can protect their citizens from the impacts of dangerous climate change. All countries and citizens must act together motivated by enlightened self-interest and human solidarity for a better future for all. I worry about references to 'managing expectations in Paris' because there is a danger this will lead to too low a level of ambition to point us on a different course. We need leadership and ambitious action by all countries.

It is worth exploring the leadership different countries will have to give. Developed countries have grown wealthy based on fossil fuels. Their leadership is based on peaking (if they haven't done so already) and then rapidly reducing their emissions while making the transition to sustainable development. They also have an obligation to help developing countries to adapt to climate impacts and to make the transition to zero carbon development. To date these obligations have not been met, and as a result have eroded trust and quashed ambition. Hence a commitment to lead by developed countries is critical to success this year.

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Robynson Foundation – Climate Justice: *Zero Carbon, Zero Poverty - The Climate Justice Way* (2015): <http://www.mrfcj.org/pdf/2015-02-05-Zero-Carbon-Zero-Poverty-the-Climate-Justice-Way.pdf>

The majority of developing countries are in a different situation and so will give a different leadership. They are at an earlier stage in their development and as a result many have low levels of emissions. They will need to meet their sustainable development goals without using fossil fuels – in other words they will have to develop using a different model to that which made the industrialised countries wealthy. This is a different prospect than merely reducing emissions and requires the absolute support of the international community. No country has developed without fossil fuels to date – so cooperation is key to providing the technology, finance, skills and systems to create an alternative way of developing. Emerging economies, for their part, face both leadership issues. Their emissions have grown rapidly, so they have to determine a pathway to reduce their emissions. At the same time, they need development through renewable energy to lift their people out of poverty, which again must be supported with finance and technology by the international community.

It is in our collective self-interest to support this transition and this new model of development - as without it we will exceed the carbon budget and be forced to accept the consequences of a 4°C world. And that world will be far more unfair and unjust than the one we live in now.

So what I wonder might stop us from making this transition and from seizing the moment in 2015? It may sound idealistic – but it is what science informs us we must do. It will be hard, but it is doable and affordable. It does pose risks – but it also opens up opportunities to do things better. Why I wonder are we so wedded to business as usual – and why are so many scared of change? Is business as usual so successful that the risks of moving away from it are too great to take?

I don't think so. Business as usual has resulted in dangerous levels of pollution, caused climate change and biodiversity loss and has failed to eradicate poverty and inequality.

The current system is deeply dependant on and influenced by fossil fuels. The decisions governments, municipalities and people around the world make every day are affected directly and indirectly by the price of oil and other fossil fuels. This is illustrated in the IMF's



Annual World Economic Outlook<sup>6</sup> which focuses on the opportunities and threats from oil and not on the risks of climate change and opportunities of climate action. Business as usual with fossil fuels as the foundation of the global economy is the dominant discourse but it can be changed with the transformational leadership I spoke of a moment ago.

I believe a zero carbon, climate resilient pathway to prosperity is more likely to support the right to development than business as usual, especially for countries that are still developing. Carbon would ultimately constrain development in the least developed and most vulnerable nations of the world as climate impacts lead to more poverty and greater inequality. In a transition to zero carbon and zero poverty on the other hand the potential benefits outweigh the risks, with opportunities for developed and developing countries in terms of energy security, greater competitiveness, better health, decreased mortality, job creation and greater resilience.

My friend Sharon Burrow and her colleagues in the International Trade Union Confederation understand the benefits and the risks of this new approach. From their starting point of ‘there are no jobs on a dead planet’, the trade unions support ambitious climate actions and a ‘just transition’ where no one is left behind, neither the workers dependent on the fossil fuel industry nor the people who are poor and live in situations vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. An ITUC Global Poll<sup>7</sup> of the general public in fourteen countries revealed that 73 per cent of people want governments to do more to limit pollution causing climate change. In Brazil, South Africa, Russia, Italy and India 80 per cent or more of respondents wanted action by their governments. A just transition looks to the opportunities, for industrial transformation and new quality jobs in the green economy as well as greater equality. There is less to fear from this path than a blind commitment to the one we are on.

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<sup>6</sup> International Monetary Fund: *World Economic Outlook - Uneven Growth: Short- and Long-Term Factors* (2015) <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2015/01/>

<sup>7</sup> International Trade Union Confederation: *FRONTLINES BRIEFING MARCH 2015: CLIMATE JUSTICE - THERE ARE NO JOBS ON A DEAD PLANET* (2015) <http://www.ituc-csi.org/three-quarters-of-world-s-people?lang=en>

Another driver for a new ways of doing things is inequality – research by Oxfam<sup>8</sup> shows that the share of the world’s wealth owned by the best-off 1% has increased from 44% in 2009 to 48% in 2014, while the least well-off 80% currently own just 5.5% . Seven out of 10 people live in countries where the gap between rich and poor is greater than it was 30 years ago. When you add to this the numbers of people living in poverty - 2.2 billion people lived on less than US \$2 a day in 2011 - only a slight decline from 2.59 billion in 1981 according to the World Bank – it becomes clear that the Business as Usual model of development we are so wedded to, is not doing such a good job.

It is worth recalling again that the actions we need to take to achieve sustainable development are the same actions we need to take to adapt to climate change and implement zero carbon development. So the decisions we take at the international level in 2015 are important – because they will be translated into actions at the national level and because they send signals to the wider community including investors that we are heading in a new direction.

This new direction is new for all countries. As I said earlier, no country has achieved sustainable development, no country has met its development objectives without using fossil fuels and all countries are learning how to adapt to climate change. This means there is great potential for cooperation and for countries to learn from each other and to support each other. In this context climate finance is a catalyst; it reduces the risks associated with climate impacts and the transition to low carbon development in developing countries and unlocks the potential for investment to flow in a new direction.

The human rights framing for a new path to development is set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states, in article 28 that:

*Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.*

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<sup>8</sup> Oxfam International: *Wealth: Having it all and wanting more* (2015)  
<http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/wealth-having-it-all-and-wanting-more-338125>

We haven't yet created this social and international order – and any hope of creating it in the future would be wiped out by uncontrolled climate change. But I think we could create an international order where all people realise their rights if we grasp the opportunities 2015 presents.

President Tong of the Republic of Kiribas, said in Geneva last month;

*“If there is a major challenge on human rights that deserves global commitment, leadership and collaboration, this is the one: the moral responsibility to act now against climate change.”<sup>9</sup>*

I look forward to working with you all this year to make sure that we harness and deliver this moral responsibility to act. Now is not the moment to manage expectations or get cold feet – 2015 is the moment to catalyse a transformation – and achieve the social order the Universal Declaration aspired to. Now is the time for climate justice.

As Victor Hugo suggested in *Histoire d'un Crime* “greater than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come”.

Thank you.

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<sup>9</sup> President Tong, Republic of Kiribati at Human Rights Council panel on Human Rights and Climate Change, March 2015