

26 March 2015



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Speech by Mary Robynson
President, Mary Robynson Foundation- Climate Justice

I am delighted to be here today at Wake Forest University and honoured to be asked to give this speech as a Voice of Our Time. I feel I am among kindred spirits, when I read the College Motto “Pro Humanitate” (For Humanity). It resonates very strongly with me as being close to my own values and those of my Foundation’s work on Climate Justice and what it stands for in a people centred approach to climate change.

On February 1, 1960 a little over 30 miles from here the “lunch counter sit in” by the Greensboro Four marked a significant moment in the fight for racial equality in this country. Fifty-five years later, one of the four young men who staged the sit in, Jibreel Khazan, has said that “climate change is young people’s ‘lunch counter moment’ for the 21st century.” He also says that “it is the biggest threat to justice and opportunity our planet has ever seen”. I too believe that climate change is the biggest threat to humanity of the 21st century. The impacts of climate change on people’s lives and their enjoyment of their human rights are what brought me to the issue of climate change. Climate change is, I believe, not just an issue of atmospheric science; it is also about human rights and this is what continues to motivate me to find urgent and equitable global responses to the climate crisis.

The evidence that the climate is changing and that human beings are largely responsible for the changes should now be undisputed. The 10 warmest years since records began in the 19th century have all been since 1997, and 2014 was the Earth’s hottest year on record. The Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released in 2014 identified that the actions taken by the world to date to limit climate

26 March 2015

change have been grossly inadequate, and if we continue business as usual we are on track to a 4°C warmer world compared with pre-industrial levels. This would lead to extreme and potentially irreversible impacts.

If we don't take action to keep warming of the earth's atmosphere as far below 2°C above pre-industrial levels as possible we are sure that heat waves will occur more often and last longer, and that extreme precipitation events will become more intense and frequent in many regions. The oceans will continue to warm and acidify, and global mean sea level will continue to rise. About 70% of coastlines worldwide are projected to experience a sea-level change. The State Climate Office of North Carolina reports the sea level along North Carolina's coast has risen by a foot since observations began in the 1930s, and future climate forecasts suggests the sea level may increase another two to three feet over the next 100 years. That brings with it many potential negative impacts on those who live along the 300 plus miles of North Carolina coastline, undermining the full enjoyment of their human rights.

Unfortunately we don't need to look to the future to see the impacts of climate change. It is real, and it is the here and now. As President Anote Tong of the Republic of Kiribati said at a recent Human Rights Council meeting – "climate change for us low-lying islands is no longer a future event – it is happening now". We can all see the devastation brought by extreme weather events - Hurricane Katrina, Super Storm Sandy, Super Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, the recent devastation in Vanuatu of Cyclone Pam, and recent widespread flooding in Malawi and Mozambique. These extreme weather events will become more frequent and more intense because of climate change. So while science tells us that the tipping point is a two degree warmer world, for many people, typically the most vulnerable, their tipping point has already come.

I was very happy to hear that this lecture would take place during the Human Face of Environmental Inequality Symposium. I think it is very important that we keep a human face to these discussions. To me the human face of Climate Change is women such as Ursula Rakova, whom I have come to know. Ursula is leading the resettlement of her community from the Carteret Islands to Papua New Guinea because of rising sea levels. Ursula's people are amongst those who have contributed least to the problem of climate

26 March 2015

change yet they are the ones who must make a new home, find new livelihoods, new schools. They cannot take with them the bones of their ancestors.

Too often we tend to focus on the processes, agreements and international discussions and this allows us to detach ourselves from the human impacts of climate change. That is why my Foundation focuses on climate justice. Climate justice links human rights and development to achieve a human-centred approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its resolution equitably and fairly.

This connection between human rights and climate change has been made in resolutions of the Human Rights Council since 2008. These resolutions recognise the negative impacts of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights, in particular for those segments of the population that are already in vulnerable situations owing to factors such as geography, poverty, gender, age, indigenous or minority status and disability. They also point to the fact that human rights obligations, standards and principles have the potential to inform and strengthen international, regional and national policymaking in the area of climate change, promoting policy coherence, legitimacy and sustainable outcomes.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations have taken on board these issues also. The Agreement reached in Cancun at the 16th Conference of Parties include a reference to existing human rights obligations and “emphasises that Parties should, in all climate change-related actions, fully respect human rights.”

The challenge now is to ensure that the negative impacts of climate change on people’s rights prompt the global community to take urgent and ambitious action on climate change, and that in shaping this action and making it as inclusive and equitable as possible, we are guided by human rights obligations. The end result of this approach will be more effective climate action.

26 March 2015

2015 presents the world with a significant opportunity to ensure that we deliver such an action. We will see deliberations conclude on a new set of Sustainable Development Goals for all countries, which will be adopted at the Special Summit on Sustainable Development in New York in September. Following this will be the signing of the new climate agreement in Paris in December. The coming together of these processes creates a unique opportunity to stabilise climate, and transform the lives of billions of people.

For this to happen a robust set of agreements must be adopted which guarantees a pathway to end extreme poverty, to reduce inequality and to minimise the risks posed to development from climate change. To do this and ensure we get fair and equitable agreements the world needs all of you to be the voices of your time. Political leaders will not act with the necessary sense of urgency, equity and ambition unless they feel a groundswell of support from their constituencies. The national movement influences the international response. Let me paraphrase the words of someone I truly admired, a great friend of Wake Forest and herself a real champion of justice Dr Maya Angelou “let the need for change bulldoze a road down the centre of your mind” and let’s make this a year that counts.

The summit on climate change in December will focus on four pillars, as outlined by the French Presidency. The first is the legal framework agreement, the second is the intended contributions that all countries have said they will make to reducing carbon emissions, the third is about climate financing and the fourth includes activities of all other sectors, including civil society. This issue is too important to be left to political leaders alone, we all need to engage.

I have to admit that when I had the honour to serve as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, from 1997 to 2002, climate change was not front of mind. In the years since then the impacts of what seemed a distant threat have become a harsh reality and led me to establish my Foundation on climate justice. We need to change the debate on climate change – to move beyond its construct as a scientific or environmental problem and to realise that it is in essence an issue of development and of rights. Taking a

26 March 2015

climate justice approach to climate change means respecting human rights and ensuring that climate actions are good for the planet and good for people.

I am glad to say I am not alone in this thinking and there are many positive actions taking place. I am glad to acknowledge the work of a good friend and ally Professor John Knox. As UN Independent Expert on the issue of “human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment”, Professor Knox has played a key role in progressing the issues of human rights and climate change. Most recent is the report on best practices relating to the use of human rights obligations and commitments to inform, support and strengthen environmental policy making which he presented at the 28th session of the Human Rights Council. Providing these best practice case studies, including the six in relation to climate change, is essential in progressing the discourse on human rights and climate change, but also practical in giving states examples of how to take a rights based approach to their climate actions.

In October 2014, Professor Knox and 26 other Special Procedures Mandate-holders of the Human Rights Council issued an open letter to state parties to the UNFCCC calling on them to strengthen the human rights commitments within the Paris climate agreement. They recommended that “parties should, in all climate change-related actions, fully respect, protect, promote and fulfil human rights”. This call to action has been heard and the current negotiating draft of the Paris Agreement contains the human rights language that the Special Procedures Mandate-holders, and others, called for. The challenge ahead of us now is to retain that language as the negotiations progress.

There is a growing consensus among states of the need to ensure that we address human rights within climate actions. A study commissioned by my Foundation identified that some countries are actively linking human rights and climate change in their policy making and reporting on this to the UNFCCC and the Human Rights Council. Unfortunately these countries are in the minority and more work is needed to share and learn from these experiences and scale up these good practices.

26 March 2015

There are national governments who are already taking the lead with promising results for people and planet. Let me talk about an example from Vietnam. The right to education is conferred on Vietnamese citizens in the country's constitution. Of specific importance to climate change, the constitution also recognises the role of education for "regions and peoples with particular challenges" including vulnerable people living in the mountainous and low lying parts of Vietnam.

These rights are also reflected in Vietnam's National Strategy and Law on Gender Equality which promote equal access to and benefits from policies on education and training. Consequently, the National Strategy on Climate Change launched in 2011 achieves real significance in the context of rights through specific targets to guarantee, among other things, food security and gender equality.

As a result actions to adapt to climate related disasters are informed by rights and are empowering previously vulnerable women to be actors in the national response to climate change.

Women such as Ran Nguyen a farmer in the Bing Ding province in central Vietnam, who like many farmers in rural Vietnam, has suffered due to increasingly frequent and severe storms associated with climate change resulting in loss of life and livelihoods. Ran participated in a project implemented by UN Women, the government of Vietnam and the Vietnam Women's Union, to build the resilience of women and their communities to extreme climate events. As Ran put it herself

"Thanks to good preparation... ..nobody in the village was killed or injured in last year's storm season."

Last month my Foundation co-hosted an event in Geneva with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, where we brought the human rights and climate change communities together for a Climate Justice Dialogue. From this dialogue the idea of the Geneva Pledge arose. The pledge which was launched at the closing session of the climate convention, and signed at the time by 18 countries, looks to facilitate meaningful collaboration between national representatives in these two processes to

26 March 2015

increase the understanding of how human rights obligations inform better climate action.

While progress is being made, time is running out to avoid dangerous climate change. We are the last generation to be able to do something about climate change, and the first generation to understand how serious it is. This year, 2015, presents a unique opportunity to set the global community on a new path; away from fossil fuel based development and towards a sustainable alternative that will ensure the protection of the rights of generations to come.

In designing the global response to climate change we have an opportunity to eradicate extreme poverty, ensure access to clean energy for all and achieve equitable access to sustainable development. Research recently commissioned by my Foundation investigated how such a phase out might be achieved equitably. The research shows that actions by all countries are needed to save the planet for humanity. To deliver this action on the scale and in the timeframe required to avoid dangerous climate change, the global community must act in solidarity and invest in the transition to zero carbon and zero poverty in all countries.

The infrastructure and technologies we install today will affect emissions both today and through this century. The solution is to make a rapid transformation of our economic systems away from a dependence on carbon while protecting the right to development of the poorest and most vulnerable people and countries.

Let us keep in mind that development requires energy but not carbon emissions. The right to development of people in developing countries requires that they have access to alternative sources of energy to develop and lift themselves out of poverty. It is unreasonable to expect developing countries to reduce emissions on their own at an equivalent stage of development to when rich countries were dramatically increasing theirs. The only feasible way to achieve this is through the provision of support, both financial and technological, from those countries with greatest capacity. Only with this support will the phase out be achieved on a timescale which avoids dangerous climate change.

26 March 2015

The good news is that many emerging and developing countries have been taking ambitious action across all the fronts needed to address climate change. Brazil has reduced net deforestation by two thirds since 2004, which has delivered one of the greatest reductions in greenhouse gas emissions achieved anywhere in the world over the last decade. Ethiopia is aiming to become a middle income country by 2025 through its work to move to carbon neutrality. Guyana will cut energy-related emissions by 92% by 2017- more than any country in the developed world - while maintaining over 99% of its forest, which is bigger than Britain. Small island developing states, including Dominica, the Maldives, Timor-Leste, Samoa and many others, are showing how national scale transitions to carbon neutrality can be achieved.

A low carbon, climate resilient pathway to prosperity for developing countries is more likely to support the right to development than business as usual. Carbon will ultimately constrain development in the least developed and most vulnerable nations of the world as severe climate impacts lead to more poverty and greater inequality. In a transition to zero carbon and zero poverty, on the other hand, the benefits outweigh the risks, with opportunities for developed and developing countries in terms of energy security, greater competitiveness, decreased mortality, job creation and greater resilience. We must act now – a carbon phase out must begin quickly and extend globally in order to avoid the worst impacts of climate change and keep warming of the earth's atmosphere as far below 2°C above pre-industrial levels as possible.

Effective climate actions need to be based on a human rights framework. Without attention to human rights, climate policies and actions can have unintended negative impacts on people's lives. We know that the risks to human rights from climate change are far more significant than the risks associated with a rapid phase out of carbon emissions. However this does not negate the need to ensure that all actions seek to address human rights and ensure a just transition.

Perhaps more than any other problem humanity has faced, climate change confronts us with the reality of our interdependence. No country alone can protect their citizens from the impacts of dangerous climate change; climate change observes no boundaries.

26 March 2015

Therefore solving the problem requires countries and citizens to act in solidarity, motivated by enlightened and collective self-interest for a better future. Solidarity is at the core of climate justice. It is about sharing the benefits and burdens of climate change – and our response to it.

We have a great opportunity this year. We need to ensure that we use this opportunity and make a difference to ensure that our voices are heard and we all become the voices of our time. I ask my colleagues in the Foundation to be “Thought Leaders” in their personal lives and put into practice the values and principles espoused by the Foundation. I also encourage you all to be thought leaders in your homes, communities and colleges.

We understand the problem and we know what has to be done, so let us take action now. To use the words of a young woman who herself has become a voice of her time, Anne Frank,

“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world”

Thank you.