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Hunger – Nutrition – Climate Justice 2013 Conference

Keynote Speech, Opening Session, 15 April 2013

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President, Tánaiste, Ministers, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am so pleased to see you all here today. This conference started as an idea, a dream, almost 2 years ago and today it becomes a reality. Thank you all for being here and making this possible. I also commend the leadership given by the Government of Ireland on the issues of Hunger, Nutrition and Climate Justice, and the dedicated work of the Department of Foreign Affairs, in particular Irish Aid.

Like the Tánaiste, I would like to acknowledge the excellent collaboration we have had with the World Food Programme and the Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security Programme of CGIAR. My sincere thanks to the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) for helping us to prepare for and deliver the conference, and to the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF) for making such broad and inclusive participation possible.

On Saturday morning I had the opportunity to meet and greet a number of those who have come from different parts of the developing world to share their experiences and case histories. It was very moving to see their commitment, and their eagerness to meet each other, and learn from different experiences in



coping with providing food and nutrition despite the negative effects of climate change.

This month I have addressed a number of audiences on the issues of food and nutrition security. On 4 April I participated in the Madrid High Level Consultation on Hunger, Food Security and Nutrition in the Post-2015 Development Framework, and on 9 April I spoke at a Global Food Systems Forum sponsored by the University of California. The following day, I took part from California in a global teleconference of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Lead Group, together with my colleague Tom Arnold. The issue of climate change was not a central topic of these gatherings. That is why I am so pleased that we are gathered here now with a unique focus on climate justice.

From the start we wanted this conference to be different. We have planned it as a listening conference where the emphasis is on hearing the experiences of those who grapple with the linked challenges of hunger, under nutrition and climate change on a daily basis, on small farms, in pastoralist communities, on small islands and in cities and towns around the world. We are not here to tell people what to do – we are here to learn about what needs to be done and how.

Now, I admit that listening does not always come naturally to policy makers and political figures, so I am challenging all of us that fall into that category to really seize this opportunity to listen to the voices gathered here in Dublin. It is rare to have so many diverse experiences under one roof and we must make the most of this opportunity through a respectful and inclusive dialogue.

Let us be honest and admit we have not made the progress we desire on tackling hunger, nutrition and climate change – the shocking statistics on hunger and

under nutrition highlighted by the Tánaiste are an affront to us all. It makes no sense, morally, economically or developmentally, that children are undernourished and unable to reach their full potential. But it is also an injustice, passed from one generation to the next, as we fail to address the root causes and fail to solve the problem.

If we continue to address hunger, nutrition and climate change as separate issues – we will not solve any one, much less all three of the challenges. People are hungry and under nourished for many reasons, including lack of access to resources, the absence of rights, conflict, natural disasters and now, climate change. Climate change is the last straw for many – caused by people living lives vastly different to theirs and enjoying a quality of life they can barely imagine – it is indiscriminate in its impacts, hurting those who have contributed least to the problem the most.

It is clear to me, when I visit families and communities living with the daily reality of poverty, that they see no divisions between climate change, nutrition, food security and the broader issues of human development such as the protection of rights, access to decision making and accountability. All of these issues are linked, closely-related, part of the reason why people are poor, powerless, in ill-health or hungry.

Our challenge is to understand these linkages in the same way that those experiencing them do, and to design responses that solve the closely related problems. That's what this conference gives us an opportunity to do. I hope that through our discussions we can extract some wisdom and powerful messages to help shape the way we do development in the future. Our meeting



is timely given that we have a window between now and 2015 to design a new international development agenda. This matters because commitments made at the international level in turn inform national and local policies – and today we turn the tables to look from the grassroots up rather than from the top-down.

My colleagues and I in the Mary Robinson Foundation are working to inform the post 2015 development agenda through climate justice; an approach which links human rights, climate change and development to achieve a people-centred response. A focus on people may sound obvious but it can be transformational, putting as it does the voices and experiences of individuals rather than institutions centre stage. With an ever growing number of supporters for this approach we can have the courage to face up to why we have not yet solved poverty, hunger, under nutrition and climate change. Together we can work to tackle inequality, uphold human rights, achieve gender equality, empower women and maximise participation, accountability and transparency in all aspects of development.

Climate justice is also about giving voice to those most vulnerable to the impacts of Climate change. For this reason, the most important people at this conference are the 100 plus grassroots practitioners who will share their stories, their experience and their analysis of what works and doesn't work on the ground. This is priceless information for policy makers grappling with the difficult task of shaping a whole new international development agenda. So the incentive to listen is great!

Usually in speeches I like to include the story of someone I have met to ground my messages in reality. I am thrilled that today I don't have to tell someone's



story – instead those of you gathered here will speak for yourselves, on an international stage and you will be heard. You are here because we need the benefit of your wisdom and because we cannot tolerate the continued reality of hungry families, undernourished children and the added injustice of the impacts of climate change.

We speak a lot in the worlds of human rights and development of helping people to help themselves. Every person wants to care for their own family – it is part of our nature – we have to respect this and create the conditions whereby everyone is afforded the opportunity to do so. By listening carefully over the next two days, we will learn how to do this better.

The truth is that we are talking about how to have a viable world in 2050. My four grandchildren will be in their forties in 2050, and will share the world with nine billion others. How will they all look back on this vital period, when it will be clear to them that we had the opportunity to take the right course by the end of 2015? How will we be judged - not in the long term - but in only 37 years? Will we stand accused of shirking responsibility or will we grasp the opportunity to set a new and viable course for humanity?

Let us work hard over the next two days to clarify and refine the messages we want to see in the post 2015 development agenda

Let us amplify the voices of those who need to be heard in order to tackle effectively hunger and nutrition in our climate changed world.

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