

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Speech by Mary Robinson, President of the Mary Robinson
Foundation – Climate Justice at BT Young Scientist and
Technology Exhibition 10 January 2015**

**Minister, winners Ian O’Sullivan and Eimear Murphy, guests, I
am more than happy to stand amongst you this evening to
celebrate the achievements of our young people and acknowledge
your collective efforts as supporters and enablers of a learning
environment.**

**I walked through the BT Young Scientist and Technology
exhibition yesterday and I emerged hopeful because of what I had
seen and heard. Young people from the island of Ireland, and
indeed beyond because I met some Tanzanians, were focused on
asking questions and finding answers. I was filled with hope for
the coming year because their curious minds are asking how,
why, what if?**

**It is this kind of thinking that the world needs in 2015 - a greater
imagination of the possible is vital to achieve a just and
sustainable world.**

**In 2015, which sees the 70th Anniversary of the founding of the
United Nations, world leaders are working toward two outcomes**

that will shape the future for generations to come: the creation of the next set of global goals, the Sustainable Development Goals, to follow the Millennium Development Goals, and the culmination of critical climate change negotiations which will take place in Paris in December.

Over the coming year we need to summons new strength and deploy new knowledge to eliminate poverty, generate sustainable economic growth and combat climate change.

Each of these is a challenge of immense proportions, but one stands out because of its ability to undermine progress on all the others – and that is the fact that we are rapidly running out of time to avoid irreversible climate change.

The science is clear; the climate is changing, human activity is the primary cause of these changes and if we do not take action urgently we will irreparably damage the natural systems on which life depends. These statements were made clearly in the November published *Synthesis Report of the Fifth Assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)*. That report is the culmination of many years of patient work by science experts and it also tells us that fairness and equity in shaping a global response to climate change is critical.

The report supports the basic premises of climate justice; that climate action is critical to sustainable development and poverty

reduction, that those who have contributed least to the causes of climate change are most vulnerable to the impacts; and that ‘mitigation and adaptation raise issues of equity, justice, and fairness’. It also states that delaying climate action shifts the burden of responsibility to future generations and that acting now is the only effective and fair strategy.

As well as creating new problems, climate change is also making old problems re-appear – by putting development into reverse. Progress across the world towards alleviating poverty improving gender equality, expanding education and health care, catalysing inclusive economic growth and achieving many other positive development outcomes – this progress is at risk if we don’t rapidly re-set the world’s climate trajectory onto a less-than –two degree pathway.

So yes, the climate challenge is immense. To deal with it, demands global cooperation on an unprecedented scale – a whole new era of solidarity based on an understanding of our interconnectedness. Meeting some of the students here yesterday I got the sense that they understand our global village, that they are connected to other people beyond our island nation and this gives me hope for our future.

As a global community, we must innovate now to enable us to leave the majority of the remaining fossil fuel reserves in the ground – driving our transition to a climate resilient future. We

have known for many years that we must construct a future society where inclusive, low carbon growth advances development and human rights. That means fostering decent jobs and livelihoods, expanding people's access to sustainable energy and affordable nutritious food; supporting sustainable cities; maintaining forests and other vital eco-systems; and enhancing the health of both people and the planet. We also know that we must construct a future where vulnerable countries, communities and households are sufficiently resilient to deal with the impacts of climate change.

In the rows and rows of projects which span STEM subjects at this exhibition, I saw elements of the future we want. So it is fitting that, in this decisive year for human rights, climate change and development, the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition has agreed to introduce an award for Climate Justice. I look forward to working with Dr Tony Scott and his team in developing the criteria for the award in the coming months and I sincerely thank him and the sponsors for embracing climate justice.

And so I want to urge the teachers and learning enablers to pursue education for sustainable development which means including key sustainable development issues in teaching and learning; for example, climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty reduction, and sustainable consumption.

Continue to embrace teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behaviour and take action for sustainable development. Continue to champion key competencies such as critical thinking, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative way.

The young people who participate in this exhibition are part of a generation who face an uncertain future in a climate stressed world. This is the context for their education.

I am often asked if I am an optimist about climate change. I usually answer by quoting my good friend and fellow Elder, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who describes himself as a “prisoner of hope”. I am a prisoner of hope when it comes to climate change and I have felt emboldened in this belief by my meetings with students at this exhibition.

2015 can be a year for the history books. It can be the year that we put the world on the path to end extreme poverty; the year we place sustainability at the heart of our future; and the year that we agree that every person should be able to lead a life of dignity and opportunity.

The challenge before us now- in the words of our dear poet, Seamus Heaney – is to make “hope” and “history” rhyme.

Thank you.