



# Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice

## Meeting note on COP 16 high-level event

### *Women Leaders on Climate Change*

organised by

The Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice and the Government of Mexico

Monday 6 December 2010 - 11.30 -13.00 - Monarca Room, Cancúnmesse  
COP 16, Cancún, Mexico

#### **Panellists**

- Patricia Espinosa Cantellano, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Mexico and President of COP 16/CMP6
- Mary Robinson, Former President of Ireland and President, MRFCJ
- Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC
- Connie Hedegaard, EU Commissioner for Climate Action
- Lykke Friis, Minister for Climate and Energy and Minister for Gender Equality, Denmark
- María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, Ministra Coordinadora de Patrimonio (Coordinating Minister of Heritage), Ecuador

#### **Highlights**

This event was convened by H. E. Patricia Espinosa and H. E. Mary Robinson in response to the opportunity of having so many women in positions of responsibility for COPs 15 and 16, and the interest of these and other women leaders in contributing to overcoming slow progress on addressing the challenges of climate change. The theme was built on the notion of climate justice: linking 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. Climate justice amplifies the voices of those people who have done least to cause climate change, but who are most severely affected. Climate justice brings into focus not just the enormous threats we face today, but the threats we will face for generations to come.

All of the women panellists spoke movingly, and often personally, about the enormous challenges of tackling climate change, and the incredible potential for women's leadership to make a difference to this issue. The event responded to significant interest amongst many individuals and institutions present at COP 16 to bring a stronger gender lens and women's leadership dimension to the negotiations and broader activities. It built upon discussions that happened a few days earlier at an event focusing on women leaders tackling climate change at the community and national levels. As one of the ministers noted, this was the only event she had been invited to during COP 16 where she was

asked to speak about women and gender. With over 200 hundred participants and media attention, this event was able to cement the importance of this dimension, and to acknowledge and support its growing momentum. At the meeting, an idea was proposed to create a 'Troika Plus' of women leaders on climate change, led by the governments of Denmark, Mexico and South Africa and involving other women leaders in advance of COP 17 in Durban.

### **Lykke Friis**

- "If you want something said ask a man, if you want something done ask a woman."
- Women face the effects of climate change more significantly than men, and are coming up with innovative solutions
- There is widespread lack of energy; many of the world's women currently use cook stoves which are highly inefficient, but we must bring to vast numbers of households safer, cleaner energy.
- We must beat energy poverty – the problem of course includes finance.

### **Christiana Figueres**

- "I hope you young people are born into a generation that is empowered to take control of our pressing problems."
- Over half of world's women still cook with open fires. Let us acknowledge that women are the creators of this problem. Women are the most vulnerable, and we are in charge of procuring food and water and growing our staples.
- Also women are a large part of the solution. Microfinance proves that women are powerful agents of change. We need to invest in education of girls and women provide technology and at least energy-efficient stoves.
- I looked at our Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) fund projects and methodologies. We at the UNFCCC have just published a directory that makes them understandable, and analysed whether they are relevant to women. Only a tiny proportion is focused on women.

### **Patricia Espinosa**

- This is the first time I have the opportunity to address this subject at this COP – no one else has invited me to comment on gender or women.
- Women are especially vulnerable. And as we know, any damage to the environment has a fairness component – who benefits and who pays? Any effort to mitigate and adapt puts a greater burden on some.
- Some countries are examining the connections between environment and conflict. In the DRC the Inter-parliamentary Union of Legislators addressed deforestation from violent conflict. Related to this, we must ask how climate change solutions can help repair our societies.
- Women in positions of authority have a clear responsibility to work toward agreements that are ambitious and fair. We must bring a gender perspective into the negotiations. Addressing climate change represents a transformation of society –the way we produce, the way we use. This provides a unique opportunity, and gender must be a central part.
- Every day there are more women in positions within politics, though we are still underrepresented.
- Fairness and climate justice must be a key aspect of our deliberations. We owe it to our daughters and granddaughters, and those women who came before us.

## María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés

- We are not a separate club, but it's impossible to have collective thinking on gender and climate change unless we meet and discuss. As a poet I keep thinking about what is the power we have, and thought of this definition for the leadership we need to take: "Leadership is a process of social influence to enlist others in the accomplishment of a common task."
- There are an unprecedented number of women in positions of responsibility, and women taking responsibility at the highest levels. But around us we see a very different picture when it comes to climate change impacts. Look at climate migrants – this process hurts people, particularly women and children. Women and children are 14 times more likely to die when migrating. Inequality and poverty put women in a more vulnerable situation. Climate change exacerbates that. More than 70 percent of crops in Sub-Saharan Africa are in the hands of women.
- How can we translate this into concrete responses? The solution relies on 'women warriors' struggling for their survival.
- It's not only about money, but also the governance structure and power dynamics. We need a closer dialogue between senior women leaders and women warriors struggling creatively in their daily lives, to better inform and enlighten our efforts.

## Connie Hedegaard

- Let's not fool ourselves. Having lots of women leaders doesn't change things, but there is one difference - we have so many other responsibilities in our lives, and to our families, that we must defend to ourselves why we are here.
- Women also have less fear of losing face as we move into compromise during negotiations.
- One thing that concerns me a lot is language—nobody understands what we are talking about when we talk about climate change. We need to make the case – not based on numbers - temperatures and ppm (parts per million), and bears and glaciers. Climate change is here already and it is affecting *people*.
- Moving forward, working more on development, climate change and energy access is an important idea. In March I visited a huge development project in Hyderabad, India, a Community Forestry Project that reduces reliance on forest wood fuel and improves energy efficiency. It is bringing a lot of income to households. Now there are more two-income families. A side benefit is that there is an enormous amount of strong, proud women. And once the houses they had improved, more children were sent to school.
- Using climate change as a driver for sustained development takes it beyond being a luxury issue.

## Mary Robinson

- There is a need to change the narrative on climate change by integrating gender into each of the issue areas. This would be an important way of making the whole process more people centred, and reflect a climate justice approach.
- In particular, it would be important to have gender language inserted into the new Climate Fund, both in how it would be allocated and in the structure of decision-making related to the Fund itself.
- Propose that every group at COPs be gender-balanced. Gender integration is needed at every operational stage.

## Discussion – Questions & Answers

Many important issues were raised during the discussion. One was on promoting gender-sensitive spending for adaptation. Household energy is key. We need a direct access modality for local groups because funds aren't reaching them.

Gender is more than household issues. There is a gender dimension to increasing the supply of energy. When building infrastructure, will it be roads, when almost all cars are used by men, or public transportation which is relied upon by most women?

There was a promise by the panellists, and high interest amongst participants to keep the gender dialogue open. One participant noted that it is extremely encouraging that the panellists were speaking on behalf of other women, not just their own institutions, and wondered if there could be an on-going policy forum.

Mexico promised support for the road to South Africa: We commit to keep gender dialogue open. It was noted that the most vulnerable women live in Asia and Pacific. Language there must be more gender-sensitive.

The Minister of Environment in Namibia noted that the biggest challenge we are facing now is that deadlocks and slow progress at the global level is harming efforts at the local level. It was noted that we must learn from efforts on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. How can we coordinate as women?

Panelists and participants reminded the audience that this work can't be done in a silo of women – 'we have to have men on board too'. Education is central to making progress.

Patricia Espinosa committed to moving forward with inclusiveness, listening, and building a common vision. She suggested initiating a website for this purpose.

María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés said, "This is telling us there is a need we must meet." She applauded the idea of the Troika of women leaders on climate justice and expanded it to "Troika Plus" whereby Ecuador and others could join. She noted the importance of climate change as a growing geopolitical driver because we are discussing lifestyles and changes of paradigm. She mentioned the new constitution in Ecuador which recognizes the rights of nature and associated new public policies.

A participant mentioned significant concerns and opposition to the current REDD framing, and the need to empower women. Another noted that information dissemination is a real challenge. Mary Robinson reminded on the importance of enabling indigenous women's voices to be heard. María Garcés stated that the answer is leadership, and connecting the different levels. Lykke Friis reminded that women's rights are human rights.

## Conclusion

Mary Robinson summed up at the end, including:

- the need to have more meetings like this one
- the proposal to create a 'troika +' of women leaders plus friends on climate justice – a *Troika Plus on Gender and Climate Change*
- the desirability of strong collaboration on the Road to Durban
- consideration of a website portal on women's leadership on climate justice
- the need to remember that a broad approach to tackling climate change is required

She concluded by noting that "*We've got the beginnings of making sure that gender is on the agenda.*"