



***Commonwealth High Level Policy Dialogue on Climate Change: Paris Agreement,
Prospects and Perspectives***

Delegates' Lounge, Marlborough House, London, 6 April 2016

Keynote Address by Mary Robinson

It is a pleasure to be with you all this morning. Thank-you Secretary General for bringing us together to discuss the way forward from last December's COP21 in Paris. May I also congratulate you as you embark on your new role. The Commonwealth is a remarkable institution that is uniquely placed to give a collective 'soft' leadership on many of the world's most pressing issues, including climate change. It is good to have a strong woman at the helm and I wish you all the best!

There is no doubt that Commonwealth leadership will be needed in the years ahead as we seek to build on the outcomes of COP21.

I will never forget the moment when the Paris Climate Agreement was adopted. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius brought down his gavel, and the room erupted in loud cheers from hundreds of people. Many were in tears and there was an overwhelming feeling that we were witnessing a moment of history. After years of painstaking work - and many hard-fought arguments – over 190 countries came together to face the common challenge of climate change. They also showed how multilateralism, dialogue and respect for the other's points of view can lead to common positions for the benefit of all.

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In the hours afterwards, I spoke of how the Paris Agreement was an “agreement for humanity” and of how the call for climate justice from millions of people across the world had come into the negotiating rooms in Paris.

I then flew back to Dublin in time to celebrate Christmas in Ireland. Over the holiday season, I thought a great deal about Paris as I spent some wonderful time with my five grand-children. They are young, ranging in age from almost 2 to 12. But they – and their peers around the world – are what Paris was really about. They will experience first-hand whether Paris was an essential breakthrough to stabilize our climate, whilst also dealing with the climate change that is already unavoidable, or whether it was a false dawn. I thought of how they will share their world with about 9 billion other people by 2050, and of how the Paris Agreement will impact all of their lives. I asked myself then, and I still ask myself: what will these 9 billion people think about those of us who celebrated the Paris Agreement in December 2015?

Their answer is not automatic or pre-determined - and we have a lot more work to do if we want their judgement to be positive.

While it is right to characterize Paris as an unprecedented success, we must also recognize that it is just the foundation on which we now need to build. It is quite a fragile foundation, which commits us to staying ‘well below’ 2°C of warming above pre industrial levels and to working for 1.5°C, but without strong, legally enforceable measures to achieve that.

One positive outcome of Paris is that we now have a framework of Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, or INDCs. Almost all countries have set out the climate outcomes that they predict their countries will be able to achieve before 2025 or 2030.

Analysis concludes that even if all the INDCs are successfully implemented, they lead us to global temperature increases of more than 2.7 °C above pre-industrial levels. Furthermore,

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many INDCs require conditions for action that are not yet in place – including meaningful action at scale on climate finance and support for developing country leadership.

While the national commitments made on a voluntary basis in the lead up to COP21 are not legally binding, the requirement to review and revise these upwards is, as are the provisions around transparency and accountability. What Paris has created is a legally binding pathway for climate action – the open question is whether this pathway will deliver action at the speed and scale needed to keep warming to 1.5 or well below 2oC?

This is where the rules that will govern the implementation of the Paris Agreement are important. This will be the focus of work in the coming years under the UNFCCC. The rules on transparency are crucial, so that a regime is created that enables oversight by governments, civil society and citizens. The rules will need to be strong to bolster what is a non-punitive compliance mechanism under the Agreement.

Therefore, the urgent task for the years ahead – starting now – is to use the framework created in Paris to boost the measures outlined in INDCs, and to continually inject yet more ambition into all climate actions, including those which are being pursued by sub-national authorities and businesses. We cannot feel satisfied until we have a credible path to a safe world, and a clear understanding of how we are going to support those who are dealing with climate impacts that are already inevitable.

We will not get there if we think that we can rely on one-size-fits-all global solutions. And in particular, we will not get there unless we successfully support the leadership that is coming from many of the peoples and governments of the developing world.

The idea that developed and developing countries have differing challenges is not always an easy one to discuss. But all involved in the Paris Agreement recognize that rich countries must create zero carbon economies over time by phasing out their high emissions. They have put

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most of today's stock of emissions in the atmosphere, they have a responsibility to dramatically reduce their future emissions, and they can afford to do so.

However, even if the developed world delivers deep de-carbonization, this won't be enough to achieve the zero carbon world we need.

This is because most of the energy supply, buildings and transport infrastructure that has yet to be built, as well as most of the world's agriculture and major forests, are in the developing world. It is therefore in everyone's interests that the developing world is able to build low carbon energy, transport and urban infrastructure, while also pursuing sustainable agriculture and forestry practices – otherwise, these activities will become unacceptably high sources of emissions.

The challenge is compounded by the reality that developing countries are also facing massive costs to deal with the impacts of climate change that are already occurring. And they have to do all this while faced with a whole array of other development challenges that put pressure on scarce public and private finances - such as education and healthcare, or the urgent need to pursue private-sector led growth and create jobs.

Yet despite these enormous challenges, developing countries are showing leadership.

I saw this myself throughout my time as the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Climate Change.

When I visited Samoa to attend the Small Island Developing States conference in 2014, I was struck by the leadership on climate change - and on sustainable development more broadly - from so many of the SIDS. I saw how those who lived and worked in SIDS are witnesses to the human impacts of climate change, and know how lives and livelihoods can be damaged, how human rights and development gains can be undermined. This impression was reinforced when

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I was in Fiji last September for the Pacific Islands Development Forum, and saw how impossible it would be for the leaders of those islands to return home after Paris without a commitment to keep open staying below 1.5°C.

I also saw how they, and other developing countries – large and small - are working out how to transition to low carbon economies. Despite its climate challenges, which were made so tragically clear by Cyclone Winston, today we have heard the High Commissioner for Fiji confirm Fiji's determination to become carbon neutral. Ethiopia aims to be middle-income, achieve ambitious greenhouse gas emissions reductions and invest in renewable energy by 2025, despite its backdrop as one of the world's poorest countries, with 74% of its population currently living without access to energy. Costa Rica is also a good example of a country transitioning to a low carbon economy- in 2015 it achieved 99% renewable energy.

In India, I saw a real seriousness of purpose about bringing electricity to 300 million citizens by 2019 - that is about the same as the entire population of the United States of America, or 60% of the population of the European Union. I have greatly admired both President Obama's climate leadership in the United States, and the European Union's support for ambitious climate action over the years – but look at the INDCs of the US or of the European Union, and you will see that neither has anything close to the level of ambition that India is pursuing.

I could make similar points about many more countries in Africa, Asia, South America, the Pacific.

And perhaps the most profound conclusion is that all these countries are seeking to do something that has never been done before: to deal with climate change, and also to develop without emissions. There is literally no advanced economy in the world that has done this.

The Commonwealth, both as Member States and as an institution, can help to support this leadership. Collectively, you comprise a third of the world's population representing every

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continent, a quarter of the world's countries, 2 members of the G7, a quarter of the G20, one of the world's two biggest countries, 31 Small States, 27 Small Island Developing States and 13 of the Least Developed Countries.

As importantly: the values on which the Commonwealth is founded provide important guidance for collaborative action, ensuring that all countries and all people are treated fairly and with dignity.

And you have a good track record. Successive CHOGMS – from Port of Spain in 2009, through Colombo in 2013, and Malta in 2015 - achieved political breakthroughs at Heads of Government level which catalyzed greater global action.

When I addressed the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers in Malta last November, I suggested that as well as these political breakthroughs, there are two areas where the Commonwealth can make a major practical contribution: firstly, you can ensure an inclusive and rights based process as climate action progresses, and secondly, you can continue to support innovative solutions on climate finance.

By facilitating an inclusive process, I mean ensuring that genuine debate and problem-solving is taking place, which gathers in the viewpoints of those giving leadership in the developing world. You can make a unique contribution to dealing with the frequent mismatch between northern viewpoints of climate solutions and southern viewpoints – because you recognize the power of home-grown solutions even when they don't adhere to theoretical models created elsewhere. Your diversity means you can look out for each other - to ensure that the voices and perspectives of smaller and less powerful countries are heard throughout.

On finance, you can help to deal with the reality that discussions about international climate finance often become politicized. In particular, when talk turns to the US\$100 billion in climate finance that the developed world has committed to mobilizing, this can become a negative

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conversation about accounting, or a defensive conversation about ensuring that climate finance is not simply international public finance that may be taken away from education or health. These perspectives should not be ignored – because they, too, are the real experiences of developing countries. For example, despite strong action from some developed countries on overseas development assistance, including the remarkable leadership shown by the United Kingdom by putting into law a commitment to provide 0.7% of GNI for Overseas Development Assistance, global ODA has decreased in real terms in recent years. So we must understand why developing countries react negatively to being told that climate finance from ODA has increased.

Instead of a continual argument about ODA, the climate finance conversation can become a positive conversation about finding genuinely new ways to support public and private leadership. Issues such as debt sustainability, the financing challenges created by achieving middle income status, and the practical challenges in attracting low cost private capital – all of these issues impact on the ability of developing countries to take ambitious climate action. But they are not always fully aired in the conversations about climate finance, despite being issues that would enrich that conversation in a very practical way. They are, however, areas where the Commonwealth is already making meaningful contributions. At the CHOGM in Malta, and at COP21, some of the most innovative solutions on climate finance emerged from the Commonwealth, including the establishment of the Commonwealth Climate Finance Hub, and the Commonwealth Initiative on Debt Swaps for Climate Action, both of which were in response to the needs of developing countries.

To conclude, I would remind us all that Paris ended a remarkable year for the international community, including agreement on the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for an approach that “reaches the furthest behind first”, and the Paris Agreement commits us to prioritising the most vulnerable countries and people. In designing the global response to climate change we have an opportunity to eradicate extreme

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poverty, ensure access to clean energy for all and achieve equitable access to sustainable development. This is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss.

My five grand-children and the other 9 billion people with whom they will share this planet will look back on 2015. If they conclude that it was the year which started us on a pathway to eliminate extreme poverty and inequality, and transition to a zero carbon economy, that will be a legacy of which we can all be proud.

Thank you.