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Global Food Systems Forum April 9th 2013

University of California, UC Davis, Ontario

**Keynote Address by Mary Robinson, President, Mary Robinson
Foundation – Climate Justice**

I am honoured to have been invited to address the Global Food Systems Forum. I would like to pay tribute to the University of California for hosting this event.

It is indeed timely as there is a welcome refocus on food and nutrition in different regions. Five days ago I attended the Madrid High Level Consultation on Hunger, Food Security and Nutrition in the Post-2015 Development Framework, co-hosted by Spain and Columbia. In less than a week I will be in Dublin for a conference on *Hunger – Nutrition – Climate Justice*, about which I will say more later. The G20 and G8 countries are increasingly aware of the pressing issues and potential solutions needed for feeding the world's rapidly growing population, using a healthy and ecologically sustainable food supply.

So, again, I commend UC Davis for this timely event. The list of speakers and participants is impressive: scientists from a variety of disciplines related to food systems, business leaders, farmers engaged in food production, environmental experts, policy makers. I look forward to hearing their valuable contribution, both from a US and global perspective.

The focus of my speech will be on how we must act now to improve the food and nutrition supply of people in poor countries and communities throughout the world. In particular, I will speak about the impact that climate change is having on food and nutrition security.

It hardly needs saying but, when it comes to food, we live in a shockingly unequal world. Almost a billion people are undernourished. In real terms, what that means is that hunger is a constant feature of those people's lives. Many will have barely one meal a day if they are lucky. It is shameful that so many of our fellow human beings, millions of them children, will go to bed hungry today and every day.

Meanwhile, wealthy countries have so much food that ever growing numbers of their populations are overweight. Obesity has become an epidemic in the Western world and there is the scandal of food waste, which needs to be addressed. Yet even in rich countries there are hungry children, and families dependent

on food stamps or other social benefits for basic food and nutrition.

When people think of hunger, their thoughts probably turn to dramatic examples of poverty-driven malnutrition and starvation as are found in famine situations. But, as the experts here today know only too well, bad as the extreme famine situations are, chronic hunger is a far more pervasive, insidious phenomenon. As well as the hardship and suffering a lack of food brings, chronic hunger retards growth, lowers resistance to disease, destroys lives.

Inequality is at the heart of global food systems. Population growth is increasing that inequality, increasing the gap between those who have more than sufficient to eat and those who are malnourished.

Earlier this year, I visited Malawi, a very poor country that faces many challenges. Its population has risen to 15 million; by 2050 it is projected to reach 50 million; by the end of the century it will reach 120 million if present trends continue. And Malawi is a small country by African standards. Today, hunger is the lot of an increasing proportion of the population of Malawi, a situation aggravated by extreme weather events, both severe drought and severe flooding. Can you imagine how many will go hungry in that small country alone in the years ahead if corrective action is not taken?

This is a key moment for such questions. Discussions about what will come after the Millennium Development Goals are now gathering pace in the build up to September's review in the UN of the MDGs.

Already it is apparent that the report card on progress towards achieving the MDGs will reinforce the evidence that we live in an unequal world.

Halving the number of people living in extreme poverty and the number of people going hungry was the first of the UN's Millennium Development Goals. Progress has been made on reducing hunger and extreme poverty but it has been unequally distributed across countries and regions. Of course it is welcome that the proportion of people living on \$1.25 a day has fallen from 47% in 1990 to 24% in 2008. Millions in India and China in particular have emerged from extreme poverty. But these figures mask a more sombre story: the poor regions of Asia and South America and, above all, Africa are still lagging far behind.

Globalisation has brought many benefits – but it has not changed the fact that we live in a society where gross inequalities exist between rich and poor, between powerful and powerless. Power has moved to different actors than in the past, particularly to large international corporations, who often own more natural resources than governments. The moral and ethical

responsibilities of these large corporations in the unequal world we live in is an issue which I hope we will address at the Forum.

Inequality means the denial of a whole range of human rights – the right to food, the right to clean water, the right to health, the rights of the child. Inequality also shows itself in another respect in that the contribution of women and girls continues to be underused and undervalued. The lack of land rights, and property rights more broadly, together with early child marriage, re-enforce this inequality.

Poor countries and peoples face an even greater challenge in the fight against hunger because of the extra burden arising from climate change. There are any number of statistics which prove the extent of the food supply problem and the impact climate change is having. And there are any number of projections as to how much it will worsen if corrective actions are not taken.

Rather than add to the statistics I would like to give a few examples from my own experience of how climate change is affecting the people on the ground.

- In Malawi I was struck by the huge impact which climate shocks are having on a weak economy almost entirely dependent on agriculture – the floods, the droughts, extreme weather events. It was deeply moving to see how fragile**

livelihoods are turned upside down in the face of climate change.

- **I had the same feeling when I visited the Horn of Africa eighteen months ago, at the height of the famine there. They had seven successive years of drought...It was a sense of a bad situation being made immeasurably worse by the changes that are taking place in the world's climate patterns.**
- **Some of the most active delegations in the climate change negotiations are the Small Island States – countries such as the Seychelles and the Pacific island states. This should come as no surprise, since they face the stark reality that their countries will disappear under the sea if corrective action is not taken on climate change.**

So what can be done to improve this dire situation?

As we aren't succeeding, despite decades of trying, we need to understand why. So we should start with a genuine exercise in listening to those we seek to help, before we design a new version of the solution to their problems as we see it.

For a start, we need to get real about the impact climate change is having on food supplies to developing countries. We must listen to the voices of those at the wrong end of the food supply chain,

the people who do not have enough to eat because the chain has not reached as far as them, and who are having to cope with the added effects of climate change.

A top down approach to the problem will not be enough. Africa is littered with examples of top down programmes and projects that failed because we did not listen to those on the ground. The people on the ground are the ones who experience poor food supply and lack of nutrition at first hand.

It is to seek answers to these problems that I have become an advocate for climate justice and established the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice.

Climate justice is a human rights based approach to combating climate change. It seeks equitable outcomes to both protect the vulnerable and provide access for all to transition to low carbon development.

Climate justice has a focus on people – it looks at the causes, the impacts and the solutions to the problem from a human perspective. Climate justice is informed by science, but it communicates and identifies solutions from the perspective of human needs and goals. It seeks equity in the way we respond to climate change so that we combine efforts to avoid dangerous climate change with working to improve the lives of the poor and vulnerable who have yet to reach their development goals.

My foundation is proud to be co-hosting a conference in Dublin next week, together with the Irish Government, which will highlight the linkage between hunger, nutrition and climate justice. It will bring together a diverse audience of some 300 people, connecting policy makers with local people and practitioners who face the realities of rising food prices, failed crops, under nutrition and voicelessness.

The conference will place special emphasis on listening to the voices of those most affected by the impact of climate change in developing countries. More than a third of the participants will be grassroots representatives, who will share their experiences with high level political representatives, policy makers, civil society, business and advocacy groups and research institutions.

I am excited about the Dublin Conference because I see it as more than producing an outcome document. The hope is that it will inspire new ways of thinking about global development challenges. In particular it will be a chance to hear from the experiences of local people, so that we can root future thematic policy approaches in the lives of people affected by climate change and their efforts to cope. For those who cannot attend, the proceedings will be podcast and the Foundation's website www.mrfcj.org will carry detailed information about the event.

I must say that the international political discussions on climate change have not been encouraging. The basic principles have been agreed in the climate Convention; Equity, and the Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities recognise that developed countries are more responsible for the causes of climate change than developing countries. Their industrialisation, based on the consumption of fossil fuels, put the greenhouse gases into the atmosphere that are causing global warming. This means that developed countries should act first to reduce emissions.

Yet I get no sense, at political level, that the need for urgent action to reduce carbon emissions is fully appreciated. At the Durban Conference of the Parties in December 2011 it was agreed that the period up to 2015 would be used to negotiate a new climate agreement for all countries. The last Conference of the Parties, December 2012 in Doha, saw some progress, particularly on the gender dimension of climate change which I warmly welcome. But work needs to be stepped up if we are to get the necessary consensus on climate change action by the time of the Paris COP in 2015. The warning signs are not being heeded. The latest projections show that, unless action is taken we are heading for a 3 or 4 degrees Celsius world by the end of the century, instead of below the 2 degrees target governments agreed is necessary. That would be some legacy to leave to our children and grandchildren!

Action has to be taken to combat climate change. What is needed, above all, is political leadership. As I have indicated, this has not been as strong as I would wish. For my part, I will continue to press leaders; I did so in February at a meeting of the European Union's Development Ministers and I will continue to do so wherever I travel.

I was encouraged by President Obama's words on climate change during his Inaugural speech and since then. Action is what is needed now. I hope that all of you will hold the President to his promises.

I said that this Forum was timely because the debate about what will come after the Millennium Development Goals is intensifying. Imperfect though the MDGs may have been, they illustrated the power of setting global goals which enjoyed universal support and a shared purpose. As we look towards the post-2015 period we need to redouble our efforts to achieve development which encompasses in equal measure the social, economic and environment dimensions of human well-being. We should build on the lessons learned from the MDGs, what works and what doesn't, to shape a new development agenda.

Future development goals should frame development differently from the MDGs. By being inclusive, of all states and all peoples within states, the post-2015 development agenda can bring

citizens, business and governments together in solidarity to address a shared set of goals. Giving voice, enabling active participation, and ensuring measurement and accountability, are all part of making this inclusiveness a reality. These development goals will be different also because they undertake from the outset to address all three pillars of sustainable development - economic, social and environmental.

Right now we have a window of opportunity to shape a development agenda which aims to see everyone having sufficient food to meet their nutritional needs. I believe that the climate justice approach can be integral to achieving that goal.

There are some positive signs that a greater understanding of the nexus between development, food, nutrition and climate justice is being understood better.

Last month I participated in a series of meetings at the World Bank. The Bank has just published a report entitled *Turn Down the Heat: Why a 4° Warmer World Must be Avoided*, which outlines the evidence for the great dangers facing us if we adopt a business as usual approach to climate change. It shows the effects of rainfall patterns, changing sea levels and the increased incidence of extreme weather events. It argues that climate change should be seen as an issue of social justice and that justice and equity should be at the heart of the discussion on climate change.

Another development I welcome is the increased interest being shown by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. The appointment of an Independent Expert on Human Rights and the Environment is a signal that the human rights dimension is finally being recognised. Professor John Knox has produced his first report to the Human Rights Council, in which he quotes from a study done by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2009. That study concluded:

“Climate change will pose direct and indirect threats to many rights including the rights to life and food, as a result of malnutrition and extreme weather events; the right to water as a result of melting glaciers and reductions in snow cover; and the right to the highest attainable standard of health as a result of malnutrition, extreme weather and an increasing incidence of malaria and other diseases that thrive in warmer weather.”

Let me address a supportive word to the agricultural and environmental experts here today. Your work has a key role to play in meeting the challenges of securing a better food supply for the poor and vulnerable.

In order to address both under and malnutrition we need to find ways to produce more food and improve access to a range of nutritious foods. Scientific research is a key tool in human development. It has led to the technologies that change our lives

for the better. Work on developing new crop varieties, improving soil fertility and creating new irrigation technologies is critical – especially in the light of climate change.

We also need to recognise the vital role of women in food production. If we do not empower women we will not have the impact we hope for on nutrition. I am pleased to serve on the Lead Group of the UN Scaling Up Nutrition movement, which aims to ensure that every woman and child is adequately nourished. The SUN movement seeks out best practice for scaling up specific nutrition interventions with a proven effectiveness. Engaging governments, civil society and the private sector in commitments that can be peer reviewed, it is hoped to deepen the movement into a global political pressure for sustainable food and nutrition.

I am glad to see a mix of skills represented here today. The Forum literature indicates that you will be discussing potential solutions for feeding the world’s population using a healthy and ecologically sustainable food supply. Food systems are complex, they involve many actors. Each has a role to play – scientists, researchers, food specialists, farmers, producers, consumers, lobbyists. Only with the good will and active participation of all these actors will the problem of world hunger be solved.

Let me end with a positive story from Malawi. On my first day there, I was taken to ICRISAT, the Malawi Seed Industry Development Programme, which focuses on partnerships between farmers, seed traders and government to improve the availability of, and access to, improved varieties of legume seeds. I was also shown projects on nutritious orange fleshed sweet potatoes and an agroforestry food security programmes. This project consisted of four inter-related components which promote smallholder livelihoods security: fertiliser tree systems for food security; fruit tree systems for improved health, nutrition and income; fodder tree systems for improved livestock and fuel wood tree systems to provide biomass energy for cooking and to reduce the rate of deforestation. Developing countries like Malawi need their own research programmes, with close links to local farmers and traders, and one positive outcome of the forum might be to build even closer links between the expertise available here, and the local knowledge and expertise available in countries like Malawi.

That is the support and solidarity which can really make a difference.

Thank you.