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Climate Justice Post Durban

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I am delighted to be in UCC to talk to you all this evening. My thanks to President Murphy for his warm welcome and to the Centre for Global Development for facilitating my visit here today.

I have had a very stimulating day learning about the research ongoing in UCC which is contributing positively to our understanding of the impacts of climate change and to the design of equitable responses to tackling this global problem.

It is great to see the same curiosity and dedication to finding solutions to the world's problems reflected in the projects of so many students participating in the Young Scientist Exhibition last week. They are the ones who will be the decisions makers, mothers, fathers and leaders in 2050

when the impacts of climate change are being acutely felt. They didn't cause the problem, we who came before are responsible for that, but the burden of dealing with it will fall squarely on their shoulders. It is interesting that climate change is one of the focal areas of the upcoming Tanzania Young Scientist Exhibition. Students there have an even more immediate need to understand the impacts of climate change and to find solutions to the problems it creates. Schools, universities and colleges need to equip students from Cork to Dar es Salaam with the skills they will need to navigate their way through an ever changing world.

International conferences taking place in Ireland later this year will help to set the scene for this, demonstrating Ireland's contribution across a range of scientific disciplines. In May the World Congress on Water, Climate and Energy takes place in Dublin and in July, Dublin will be the City of Science hosting Europe's largest science conference, the Euroscience Open Forum. A programme of science-related events and activities are being held throughout the year across the island of Ireland to showcase the latest advances in science and technology and to stimulate and provoke public interest, excitement and debate about science and technology. I hope this can build on the work of the Young Scientist Exhibition to get young people energized and involved in science and technology – so that they can shape the world of 2050 and make it a better place to live.

Last month the city of Durban in South Africa was the venue of one of the most important meetings of 2011. Durban hosted the Conference of the Parties, or COP as it is known, the annual gathering of governmental and NGO representatives concerned with what I believe to be the most critical issue we all face – the future of our planet. In these times of economic

crisis, amid worries about our own and the European and international economies, it is not surprising that attention focuses on our immediate problems. But, make no mistake about it, we ignore the threat posed by climate change at our peril. When respected institutions such as the OECD and the International Energy Agency, who are not given to alarmist statements, warn that failure to face up to the problems posed by climate change could result in irreversible damage, we must all give the issue our fullest attention.

Climate change is a complex, multifaceted problem. It has far reaching impacts on every part of the world and it hits the poorest countries and peoples hardest. I believe that a climate justice approach is the only way to tackle this grave problem and I will explain what I mean by that and what my Foundation is doing to achieve it.

Firstly, what is climate justice? Climate Justice links 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 is informed by science, responds to science and acknowledges the need for equitable stewardship of the world's resources.

It is a human rights based approach to combating climate change which seeks equitable outcomes to both protect the vulnerable and provide access to benefits arising from our 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 fully informed by science but it communicates and identifies solutions from the

perspective of human needs and rights. As such it seeks equity in the way in which we deal with the negative impacts of climate change (for example, which countries take the lead on cutting greenhouse gas emissions) and equity in accessing benefits (for example, access to off-grid renewable energy for communities living without access to electricity).

This is the work of my foundation, the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice (MRFCJ). MRFCJ’s first full year in operation, 2011, culminated in our participation at COP 17 in Durban, South Africa. In human terms these conferences are intense 2 week long sessions involving 195 countries, civil society organisations, business interests, researchers and the media. Nobody gets enough sleep, you are invariably too hot or too cold and the mood ebbs and flows in response to rumours, public statements and plenary debates.

The world went into COP17 in Durban with low expectations. On the cards was the future of the process, a successor to the Kyoto Protocol due to expire in December 2012 and the need to deliver concrete actions for the people of the host continent, Africa. In the first week I was struck by the complete lack of urgency in the formal negotiations, contrasting with the real urgency being voiced on the street, by scientists and by organisations representing the most vulnerable communities from all over the world.

Thankfully the message finally got through in the final days of the second week – the need to deliver a result, ‘to avoid the death of the Kyoto Protocol on African soil’, and to set a deadline for a new all-inclusive legal

agreement to succeed Kyoto, was acknowledged and acted on. Alliances were formed – most notably between the EU, the least developed countries and the small island developing states – and this put significant pressure on the naysayers to stand aside and let progress be made. It was the longest COP in history, going on 2 days longer than expected – and the result it delivered is important – BUT it will only help to solve the problem if it delivers on the promise that has been made.

I would like to go into this a little further and explore what the outcomes from COP17 mean in the context of climate justice. MRFCJ had three priorities going into COP 17;

- i) the legal form of a future climate agreement;**
- ii) food security and agriculture; and**
- iii) women’s leadership and the gender dimensions of climate change.**

Starting with the issue of legal form of a new climate agreement – at the crux of this was the need to decide what should happen after the end of the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol at the end of 2012. Since 2007 work has been ongoing to design a new agreement for the post 2012 period with the aim of keeping global warming to less than 2°C above pre-industrial levels. There has been disagreement as to whether this should continue to be a top down international legally binding agreement or whether the objective of reducing emissions could better be achieved through voluntary commitments by countries.

From a Climate Justice perspective, we, in MRFCJ, have argued for a legally binding international agreement as the only way to hold countries to account and to ensure that actions are taken to protect the most vulnerable.

Without a legally binding agreement there is no obligation to act. Without a global agreement that includes all countries there is a risk that the voices of the most vulnerable will not be heard, and that the biggest polluters won't do their fair share.

Durban delivered a commitment to develop '*a new protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force*' by 2015 which would come into force by 2020. Now there are two ways to read this – one is that this risks nothing meaningful being done to cut emissions until 2020. Or two, the more optimistic view (which I share) that we now have all countries of the world (including major polluters like the US who didn't ratify the Kyoto Protocol) committed to working together as part of a multilateral process to develop a new legal agreement. There is wriggle room for those countries who are reluctant to sign up to a legally binding agreement in the term '*an agreed outcome with legal force*' – however, the majority of countries are committed to a legally binding instrument and this is significant.

Lots of work will need to be done, technical, legal and diplomatic to achieve the 2015 deadline. Four years to agree on many issues which divide us and many of which are core climate justice issues – such as equity, the right to development and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. This principle of common but differentiated responsibilities is central to climate justice. It recognises that developed countries are more responsible for the causes of climate change than developing countries because the growth of their societies, based on the consumption of fossil fuels, put the greenhouse gases into the

atmosphere that are causing the problem. This means that developed countries should act first to reduce emissions. Of course some developing countries like China, India and Brazil are now starting to have significant emissions – but responsibility for the bulk of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere rests with the developed countries first. The principle also recognises differences in capacity to address the problem. Those countries that are richer tend to have more skills, technology and resources with which to control emissions and are committed under the Convention to supporting those countries with less capacity to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Ireland has an opportunity to be involved in and inform discussions on these underlying principles – with a view to finding common ground and facilitating a new agreement. We can do this by drawing on our experience, our research expertise and our strengths in facilitating dialogue, in particular with developing countries.

Meanwhile, the voluntary commitments made to reduce emissions in Cancun in 2010 need to be implemented and increased. It is expected that the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the outcomes of the 2013-2015 review of the global goal (to keep warming below 2°C) will provide additional evidence and impetus to set emissions reductions targets at a level which will safeguard us all from dangerous climate change. As part of this effort we will need to start looking at action on climate change – not as a threat to our economies and way of life – but as an opportunity for a better, more sustainable, quality

way of life. And of course, we have an opportunity to champion this approach at home and to lead by example.

The second priority issue for MRFCJ at COP17 was food security and agriculture. In recent years we have seen all too starkly the impact that extreme events such as floods and droughts can have on those least able to cope. Severe and recurrent drought was a major cause of the famine I witnessed in Somalia last July, further compounded in many regions by intense flooding in the autumn. There are also more subtle changes to seasons and rainfall patterns which have a significant impact on food security. Across the world farmers are experiencing unpredictable growing seasons, making the age old art and science of farming a guessing game. The world's population is set to reach 9 billion in 2050 and it is estimated that by then up to 25% of world food production could be lost as a result of climate change, water scarcity and land degradation resulting in an increase of 10-20% in the number of people going hungry.

The links between climate change and food security have been clear for some time and at Durban the challenge was to reflect the importance of food security and agriculture in the work of the Convention. Up to now food security and agriculture have not been a focus of the work of the Convention and work ongoing since 2009 by civil society, farming organisations, UN agencies and individual countries, has sought to bring these issues formally into the work of the Convention.

This was finally achieved in Durban and while the decision falls short of establishing a work programme to explore these issues in the context of the Convention, it does open the door to this possibility. In 2012 Parties will consider how best to support a process to address the impacts of climate change on food security and the role of climate smart agriculture in finding ways to grow food under changing climatic conditions while safeguarding the environment and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Ireland has the potential to make a significant contribution in this area drawing on domestic agriculture expertise and our international work on food and nutrition security.

A particular aspect of food and nutrition security that links to our third priority issue (gender and climate change) is the role of women in food production and land management. We know that up to 75% of people living in developing countries rely on agriculture for their livelihoods – and that over 90% of Africa’s agricultural production comes from small-scale production. Many of these farmers are women, who play a critical role in food and nutrition security and are responsible for growing, buying, selling and cooking the food. Between 60 and 80 percent of the food produced in most developing countries is produced by women. In sub-Saharan Africa the figure is between 80 and 90 percent, yet women own less than 2 percent of the land.

This takes me to our third theme in Durban - women’s leadership - through which we highlight the gender dimensions of climate change with the aim of supporting more gender equitable climate policies and actions. We know that gender blind actions in the past yielded poor results. Through decades of development work we have learned that to be successful we need to target women for agricultural training services and to

maintain water pumps and irrigation systems, as they are often the ones responsible for these activities. Likewise if we are to find effective solutions to climate change we will have to include all those that can make a difference, men and women. Ignoring or undervaluing the contribution of women restricts our potential for innovation and our capacity to act.

During COP17 I worked with an inspiring set of women leaders to highlight these issues. Through a Troika+ of women leaders including the COP President, Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, former COP President Patricia Espinosa from Mexico and Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, the tone was set from the first day of the COP when Maite said in her opening remarks – *“because we now have women leaders at the helm of this COP the outgoing President, a woman and a very capable woman, Executive Secretary, a woman and a capable woman and the incoming president....it is a very nice coincidence so we will not give up this opportunity to make use of it”*.

And make use of it they did.... Christiana Figueres held a COP women’s day on the 5th December to highlight the impacts of climate change on women and women’s role in responding to the challenge. Then, on the 7th December, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane and I co-hosted a meeting of women leaders to look at how the gender dimensions of climate change were being addressed in the texts under negotiation in Durban and with a view to Rio+20 this June. The event convened a large number of high profile women leaders including Connie Hedegaard EU Commissioner for Climate Action, US Ambassador-at-large Melanne Verveer, Christiana Figueres, ministers and directors of UN and other international organisations. We will continue work on this theme in 2012 by connecting these women

leaders with grassroots organisations to access real experiences and increase the effectiveness of their collective policy influencing.

Overall the outcome from Durban reflected the emphasis being placed on gender in speeches and side events. The texts build on the significant efforts to address gender in the outcome from COP 16 by addressing gender in actions to be taken by Parties as well as in relation to gender balance in the elected institutions under the Convention.

So, overall where does COP 17 leave us in our quest for climate justice?

Firstly the door is open for a new international and inclusive legally binding agreement to solve the climate change problem. We have a start date, January 2012, a deadline December 2015, and a lot of work to do, barriers to breakdown and agreement to reach before then. Central to this will be overcoming the divide between developed and developing countries in the climate negotiations. The alliance formed between the EU, the Least Developed Countries and the Small Island Developing States at COP17 started to challenge this divide. It is a move in the right direction that will need to be nurtured and strengthened in the coming years to facilitate an ambitious new agreement. I believe Ireland can play a pivotal role in fostering and supporting these relationships, particularly during our Presidency of the EU in 2013.

Secondly we need to keep on the pressure and increase the sense of urgency so that by 2015 Parties are ready to make ambitious commitments to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. To accompany this we will need

transparent and effective ways of ensuring equity related to the pace and scale of emissions reductions with those most responsible taking the lead. This is a key concern of developing countries who have yet to reap the benefits of fossil fuel powered growth and who fear having their development opportunities quashed by limits on their greenhouse gas emissions. These are core climate justice issues and MRFCJ will be working to mobilise world leaders, thinkers and those with influence to address these issues and find common ground.

Thirdly, we made progress on issues of importance to climate justice including gender equality and food security. Both of these issues reflect the Principles of Climate Justice which underpin the work of MRFCJ and help to communicate the human impacts of climate change and demonstrate the need for solutions which are informed by human rights. This work is far from complete and we will continue to work on these themes inside and outside the Climate Change Convention as core elements of our work on climate justice.

I welcomed the outcome of Durban because it marked progress and set targets. It was not the breakthrough needed to solve the problem now, but no one really expected that. Neither was it a failure; in fact it lays down a clear challenge to all the countries of the world – and particularly those responsible for the worst emissions – to get their act together before it is too late. A new roadmap has been set for seriously addressing climate change; we should all play our part in putting pressure on for the world’s leaders to take on their responsibilities. A new alliance was also formed – in the shape of the cooperation that emerged between the EU the LDCs and the

small island states. That augurs well for the crucial negotiations that lie ahead.

I firmly believe Ireland can play a leadership role in strengthening this alliance and championing a climate justice approach. I am heartened by recent references to the importance of climate justice by leaders in government, including the Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore in his address to the UN General Assembly last September. We now have an opportunity to embrace a human rights and justice inspired approach to addressing climate change which draws on our collective values, on our sense of empathy and on our positioning in the global community.

One of the core principles of climate justice that we have adopted in MRFCJ is to Harness the Transformative Power of Education for Climate Stewardship. Education is a fundamental human right and is indispensable to the just society. It draws those in receipt of it towards a fuller understanding of the world about them, deepening their awareness both of themselves and of those around them. Done well, it invites reflection on ethics and justice that make the well-educated also good citizens, both of their home state and (in these global times) of the world as well.

Universities and institutes of learning have a role to play in delivering multi-disciplinary teaching which increases consciousness of climate change from scientific, sociological and political perspectives. Linked to this is the need for research and innovation in the many disciplines that are affected by and hold the solutions to climate change. Embracing multi-

disciplinary research greatly facilitates a focus on the justice elements of the climate challenge. Initiatives in UCC like the Centre for Global Development and the Beaufort Laboratory, as well as UCC's participation in the Irish Maritime Resource and Energy Cluster – all of which are based on collaboration, partnership, inter-disciplinary research and real world solutions - have an opportunity to champion climate justice research. They can also create networks and partnerships for Climate Justice Research in Ireland and with developing county partners.

So, in wrapping up, I am encouraged to see the many opportunities to address climate justice in the research being undertaken here in UCC. I think you are well positioned to champion the concept of climate justice and to use it to inform your teaching and research. I believe you are well placed to show leadership by demonstrating what an inclusive, equitable, low carbon and climate resilient future can be in practice. In 2012 we will focus our minds once again on sustainable development, 20 years after the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. We have certainly made some significant gains since then – but we have also experienced first-hand the impacts of unsustainable development and challenges such as climate change risk undermining the advances we have made. Now is the time to imagine the future we want for the 9 billion people who will live on this planet in 2050. We need a new vision and the imagination and creativity to achieve it. Researchers, students and academics should play a key role in informing this vision and plotting a course to achieve it. Sustainable development considers the needs of future generations – we have a responsibility to them.

As Edmund Burke put it, society is ‘a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.’