



## Climate Change and Migration to Europe London School of Economics, 18 November 2015

### Mary Robison Initial Remarks

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*“The human journey in an era of climate disruption”*

It is a pleasure to back at LSE where I have participated in several lively discussions on climate justice in recent years. This meeting takes place in the grim aftermath of the terrible attacks in Paris on 13<sup>th</sup> November, but more than ever before we have to be true to our values and to our commitments.

As many of you will know by now, it is the injustice of the impacts of climate change and the resultant undermining of human rights, that drives me to work on climate justice. We cannot tolerate a world where people who already live in vulnerable circumstances due to poverty, gender or race, are further disadvantaged by the impacts of climate change – a global problem they bear little responsibility for.

Tonight we are focusing our minds on migration and climate change – two very topical issues given the current migration crisis in Europe and the upcoming climate change summit in Paris. Both have been affected in ways that are still hard to assess by what happened recently in Paris and its aftermath.

When a crisis happens it elicits a response. As many commentators have noted, the current migration crisis is a forewarning of what is to come. A growing world population, increasing resource scarcity and rising global temperatures will amplify the socio-economic and political factors that drive migration. So it is wise to take a long term view when responding to the current crisis – because it is likely to be the start of a longer term strategy to manage human mobility.

Human migration is a journey by people from one place to another to settle temporarily or permanently in a new location. All journeys have a start, a beginning and an end. All journeys have a reason, a purpose. And the best journeys are well planned, complication free and safe, from their beginning to the final destination.

The fundamental tools for ensuring that human migration is a safe journey are human rights. Human rights ensure dignity – and to be successful, migration must be with dignity. Human rights – from procedural rights such as participation and access to information, to substantive rights such as the rights to food, water and shelter - are the safeguards we enjoy as individuals when we move voluntarily or as a last resort.

Migration with dignity is the message carried by President Tong of Kiribati. I shared a panel with him earlier this year at the Human Rights Council and he again made an impassioned plea for international support to assist his country to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Islands atolls like Kiribati are vulnerable even in a below 2°C world. At current levels of warming these island nations are already vulnerable to food, water and energy insecurity as well as sea level rise and extreme weather events.

The migration President Tong is preparing for is migration of last resort – and as I have since reflected – a last resort I didn't have to deal with when I was President of Ireland. I never anticipated that any world leader would have to relocate their whole country during my lifetime. Likewise, when Eleanor Roosevelt and her commission drew up the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, it would have been unimaginable that whole countries would go out of existence because of human induced climate change. The same applies to the 1951 Refugee Convention – and even its 1967 Protocol - the governments that drew up these agreements could never have imagined that climate change would trigger the displacement and migration of people. We now need to use the benefits of hindsight to design a new Climate regime that is grounded in human rights and informed by science so that it stands the test of time.

The only way to avoid the type of last resort migration the Republic of Kiribati is planning for is to act now to phase out carbon emissions by 2050. Hence the vital importance of the Paris Agreement – to set this objective in a legal agreement and to ensure that the measures to make the objective a reality – access to finance, technology and capacity building – are made available so that ALL countries can deliver ambitious climate actions. And to make sure that we don't leave our human rights commitments outside the door when we design climate actions - we need to frame the agreement in human rights so that people are empowered and engaged rather than excluded and disenfranchised.

This transition - away from fossil fuels and to renewable energy, and from deforestation to sustainable land use - can also have a positive impact on poverty eradication and the quality of people's lives, if we make sure that the policies and actions taken are informed by and consistent with human rights. What we cannot and should not do is set human rights obligations aside in the rush to combat climate change. We must never lose sight of the fact that climate change is about people, and our responses to it must be fair and people-centred.

Sustainable development and adaptation to climate change are the building blocks that can help people stay in their areas of origin. Together they create the conditions needed for human wellbeing, a livelihood, access to education and health, a safe environment and a society where people participate in decision making and are protected by the rule of law.

Hence the Paris agreement needs to pay equal attention to adaptation and recognise the links to the SDGs which will also deliver climate action on the ground.

There are other forms of migration, less desperate journeys than those facing the people of Kiribati that are also in part motivated by climate change and in many cases constitute an adaptation to climate change. The movement of members of a family from a rural area affected by drought or floods to cities to find new sources of income is one example, the movement of whole families to another region or city to find a new life is another, and the migration of some family members overseas to earn remittances and send them home is another. These strategies must be understood and planned for as part of adaptation planning as envisaged in the Cancun Adaptation Framework<sup>1</sup>.

We also know that there are limits to adaptation and that the migration of last resort that President Tong speaks of is part of what we refer to in the climate negotiations as loss and damage. The Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts<sup>2</sup> addresses climate risks including human mobility and is another important forum for discussions on migration, displacement and forced relocation in the context of climate change. The Least Developed Countries and other negotiating groups are calling for Loss and Damage to be part of the Paris Agreement to place this issue on an equal legal footing with mitigation and adaptation.

No matter the motivation or the distance – the protection of people’s rights along the course of their journey and in the place they relocate is of utmost importance. The tragedies we have witnessed this year in the Mediterranean are due to the lack of these protections – and from this we must learn and be motivated to do better.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://unfccc.int/adaptation/items/5852.php>

<sup>2</sup> [http://unfccc.int/adaptation/workstreams/loss\\_and\\_damage/items/8134.php](http://unfccc.int/adaptation/workstreams/loss_and_damage/items/8134.php)

Migration is also part and parcel of human development. It has informed how civilisations have developed and it allows for the rich cultural exchanges that colour our lives. Migration can be a very positive thing. I have seen generations of Irish people emigrate out of desperation but also out of desire to see the world, to learn and explore. Over time they have sent home remittances, returned home with new ideas and skills or supported the country's development as an engaged diaspora.

Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 SDGs make a commitment to 'leave no one behind'. As with human rights this places an emphasis on the individual and implies that the SDGs apply to all people whether they are in their country of origin, in transit or at their destination.

The 2030 Agenda recognises migration as a positive force for sustainable development and it promotes the rights and well-being of migrants. Paragraph 29 recognizes the positive contribution of migrants to inclusive growth and sustainable development and mentions "full respect for human rights and the humane treatment of migrants regardless of migration status"; paragraph 14 notes that forced displacement is a threat to development progress; and paragraph 23 recognises migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons amongst vulnerable people. In addition the targets for goals 8, 10 and 17 address migration.

The universal nature of Action 2030 reminds us that migration, like climate change and sustainable development, is a challenge for all countries. These are issues that require countries to act on their own borders and to cooperate on internationally. This is picked up in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda agreed at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development which spells out actions to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration with full respect for human rights regardless of their status. All countries have responsibility to

protect human rights just as all countries have responsibility to deliver the SDGs. This applies to European countries in just the same way as it applies to developing countries. No one can shirk their responsibility and human rights law is designed to ensure this.

Human mobility in the context of climate change is a climate justice issue. It illustrates the important linkages between the climate change, sustainable development and human rights. Migration rarely occurs as a direct effect of climate change; it is motivated by a range of issues that are environmental, social and economic. So addressing migration as a climate, development or human rights issue only is unlikely to be effective – instead responses need to be found across the International processes addressing these issues and translated into actions on the ground at the regional and national level. Climate justice requires a people centred approach – it never loses sight of the individual person that is affected by climate change who is not just a victim but an actor in their own destiny.

Climate justice safeguards the rights and opportunities of the most vulnerable people – and so highlights the particular vulnerability of women migrants – but also their agency and their solutions when their participation in decision making is ensured.

The Principles of Climate Justice can inform a comprehensive approach to human mobility in the context of climate change. They call for respect for human rights including the right to development, for gender equality and for participation, transparency and accountability in decision making. These principles inform the actions all countries should undertake to implement the SDGs, to ensure human rights protections for their citizens and to both mitigate and adapt to climate change.

To form an effective response to human mobility in the context of climate change we need to step out of the siloes that traditionally separate human rights, sustainable development,

climate change, humanitarian response and disaster risk reduction (amongst others) to find coherent approaches that trigger actions across all these disciplines and policy areas.

So in implementing Agenda 2030 in the coming years all countries will need to integrate actions related to migration into their policies across the full range of the SDGs. In implementing climate actions related to adaptation and migration, countries will have to fully respect human rights to ensure migration, displacement and planned relocation with dignity. This is why it is so critical to have a human rights framing to the Paris Agreement – to ensure that the human rights obligations each country is committed to inform all climate actions and ensure that both people and the planet benefit from climate action. We cannot have a UN agreement on climate change that ignores human rights – what would that say about us? Failing to respect human rights only undermines our humanity – and saving humanity is what the climate agreement is all about.

The Human Rights Council will, I believe, play a role in consolidating and strengthening the provisions for people who move in response to factors including climate change. At present legal gaps at the international, regional and national level mean that people are vulnerable to exploitation and have their rights undermined along their migration pathways and in their new locations, whether that is a city slum in their own country or a new country on a foreign shore. The Protection Agenda produced by the Nansen Initiative<sup>3</sup> identified some of these gaps and proposes actions States can take to address them. The next step will be to develop responses to these gaps at the international and national level.

Migration is part of life. We know from the science presented in the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report that climate change is projected to increase displacement of people. It also states that populations that lack the resources for planned migration experience higher exposure to extreme weather events, particularly in developing countries with low income. So

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nanseninitiative.org/>

knowing that climate change will affect human mobility and that it will pose particular challenges for people who lack resources – it makes sense to plan for this now, as an adaptation strategy, as part of sustainable development and with human rights guiding the actions all countries take.

The IPCC also highlights the risks climate change poses to human security. The Fifth Assessment report finds that human security will be progressively threatened as the climate changes and it supports the assessment that climate change is a threat multiplied stating that ‘Human insecurity almost never has single causes, but instead emerges from the interaction of multiple factors. Climate change is an important factor threatening human security through (1) undermining livelihoods; (2) compromising culture and identity; (3) increasing migration that people would rather have avoided; and (4) challenging the ability of states to provide the conditions necessary for human security<sup>4</sup>. Addressing the causes of climate change is therefore a response to growing human insecurity, as is safeguarding human rights, empowering people to secure their own lives and increasing accountability.

Human mobility in the context of climate change will affect all countries with knock on effects on human security. An effective approach to managing this mobility will require international cooperation including support for developing countries that lack the resources to plan for migration with dignity. All countries - whether countries of origin or of destination - will be in a climate disrupted world, and so countries with internally displaced people will need to work together to share experiences and plan effective responses.

Human security requires the rule of law and a just social and political order. These are also requirements for effective climate action and sustainable development. All of these agendas need policy responses that manage and balance our increasing interdependence with our increased vulnerability.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5/images/uploads/WGIIAR5-Chap12\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5/images/uploads/WGIIAR5-Chap12_FINAL.pdf)



The initial response to the terrorist attacks in Paris has been to say that Paris is “at war” and will respond with full vigour against Isis that has claimed responsibility for the attacks. In many ways this reminds me of the response of President Bush to the attacks of 9/11, declaring war on terrorism. In my capacity as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights at the time I pleaded with the US to take the criminal route – declaring the terrorist acts as crimes against humanity that should be punished by a united front of all countries bringing the perpetrators to justice. To declare a war against terrorism had the consequence of undermining core human rights and encouraging young people who felt excluded from hope to be radicalised into being at war with the US and other Western Countries. “Being at war” gives terrorists who have committed terrible criminal acts a status they don’t deserve.

So an important first step is to address terrorism as a criminal act and bring the perpetrators to justice, using all the means necessary to do so. But the next step falls squarely back into the realm of sustainable development. It is to deliver Agenda 2030 and realise the SDGs in all countries so that we give hope and opportunity to everyone – this is the way to end radicalisation. And of course, as climate change is a threat multiplier, we need to act now to get it under control so that as we make progress on countering terrorism and eliminating poverty and injustice. We don’t then face a new wave of instability promoted by resource scarcity and extreme weather events. And in taking action on climate change we must be guided by human rights so that we don’t inadvertently create exclusion or disenfranchise the people that will be the drivers of a global transformation.

We need to believe in, and live, the values of freedom and democracy. Our challenge is to work through the Sustainable Development Goals and a robust fair climate agreement to give hope to people that they have the right to development and to a better life.

Ends.