

**CHOGM - Lunch for Commonwealth Ministers hosted by Hon.
George Vella, Minister of Foreign Affairs**

Radisson Golden Sands Hotel, Malta

Address by Mary Robinson

President, Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice
UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy on Climate Change

25th November 2015, 12:30- 14:00

I am honoured to have this opportunity to speak to such a distinguished gathering of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. My sincere thanks to Minister Vella for the kind invitation to return to Malta. I have a vivid memory of coming here in February 1997 on a week’s holiday with my husband. Our purpose was to decide whether I would seek re-election for a second 7 year term as President of Ireland. We walked at length along ramparts and visited the rich cultural institutions of Malta, but we failed to come to a decision at that time – it was just too difficult!

This meeting takes place at a crucial time. The next two weeks will see the culmination of a remarkable year for the international community when the world gathers for the Paris climate summit. I was struck by the fact that the issues you identified to talk about at this session - migration, violent extremism and radicalization, human rights and climate change - have just been thrown into a new light given the terrible attacks in Paris on the 13 November. And not just in Paris. I happened to be at an African Leadership meeting in Ghana, organized by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation when the Radisson Hotel in Bamako, Mali, was attacked and over 20 people were killed. This prompted discussion of just how many attacks against civilians are taking place with terrible consequences. Now more than ever we need to use the opportunities we have for discussion between nations – including CHOGM and the Paris summit next week - to find new and lasting solutions to our shared challenges.

The Paris summit gives us the chance to put the world on a path to averting the worst extremes of climate change, and to bolster earlier efforts this year which culminated in adoption of the

Sustainable Development Goals in September. What we need is another step up in political commitment - beyond what is reflected in the G20 Communiqué - to give clear signals to other leaders and more flexible and ambitious mandates to negotiators. This will help secure an Agreement in Paris that delivers action now, and creates a mechanism for increasing ambition over time, to achieve a zero carbon world.

Taken together, the SDGs and the Paris climate outcome have the potential to set the world on a path to eliminate extreme poverty, chronic inequality and dangerous climate change from our world by 2030.

Addressing these three injustices can, in turn, have transformative impacts on the stark issues that are the focus of this CHOGM: including migration, violent extremism and radicalization, as well as human rights and climate change itself. Part of managing migration is to support sustainable development in the countries migrants are fleeing from.

So the scale of what can be achieved could rank with major achievements in history. But to realise this potential, global political leadership is needed.

Of course, Paris has tragically dominated much of the global news in recent weeks, after the violent attacks on innocent people that took place. As we all know well, such violence is visited on innocent people every day across the world, often without media attention. But whether it takes place in the full glare of Western media or not, this kind of extremism is not only an act which causes immense pain and destroys individual lives. It is also an attack on everyone who values humanity and human dignity.

The appropriate response, therefore, is to stand together in defense of human rights and to work even harder to reduce and eliminate injustice wherever we can.

Today, international solidarity is needed like never before.

The issues you are discussing at this CHOGM are very familiar to each of you individually, and to your countries. You do not need me to tell you that none of them can be solved by any country on its own, no matter how rich and powerful the country.

Rather, the inter-linked challenges of climate change, sustainable development, peace and security, all require international cooperation and solidarity if the challenges are to be met.

And achieving that international solidarity must be the central objective of the Paris climate summit.

Climate justice – including the principle that those who did least to cause climate change must be helped to deal with its consequences – demands that this international cooperation is forthcoming

But so does enlightened self-interest.

We know that all countries need to take ambitious climate action. It is also important to recognise, that while the countries most responsible for climate change must lead by decarbonizing their economies rapidly and in accordance with science, for developing countries the challenge is significantly different. The world needs them to follow a path to development that has never been followed before: to develop without emissions.

We should be grateful that so many developing countries are setting out ambitious visions to achieve this. It is an enormous and unprecedented task, but without it, we cannot achieve the zero carbon world we need.

This is why it is so important to build an unprecedented global response, motivated by our collective self-interest and determination to enable all countries to participate in the transition to zero carbon, climate resilient development. This requires cooperation, finance, access to technology and investment in capacity development – on a scale that the international community has often promised but has yet to deliver.

This is where the Commonwealth and its Member States can play a significant role in the run up to, and at, Paris.

Your Membership understands the breadth of the challenge: the Commonwealth is remarkably representative, comprising a third of the world's population representing every 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 an important guide for this collaborative action, ensuring that all countries and all people are treated fairly and with dignity. I was struck as I read through the values espoused in the Commonwealth Charter at how closely they mirror the principles of climate justice that guide my work. These include respect for human rights, the rule of law, good governance, sustainable development, protection of the environment, education, gender equality and a focus on vulnerable states. As the world embarks on a new era of climate action, sustainable development and peacebuilding, these must be the principles that guide our collective endeavor.

Moreover, the Commonwealth has provided consistent leadership on climate change. In 2009, the Port of Spain Declaration set out many of the key elements around climate financing that continue to guide that work today. In 2013, you ensured that climate change was one of the key issues for Heads of State and Government to discuss at the Colombo CHOGM. You will continue that high level focus this week, when Commonwealth leaders will again demonstrate their political commitment to action on climate change.

So your diversity - coupled with your shared values and your sustained attention to the issue of climate change - give you a unique responsibility and opportunity to be a global catalyst for action; to conclude 2015 with an irreversible signal that we are embarking on a transition to a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable mode of development for all.

I would suggest that there are two related areas where Commonwealth countries can help immediately: first of all, you can support the creation of credible solutions on international climate finance, and, secondly, you can ensure an inclusive and rights based approach to both the process and legal outcome of the Paris Summit.

On finance, the role of international climate finance often becomes politicized and its purpose can sometimes be obscured. Yet, there is no disagreement with the overall point that international climate finance is needed, and that the commitment made to mobilise US\$100 billion per annum by 2020, to support and catalyse climate action, needs to be met. The purpose of that funding must be to boost leadership and action in poor and vulnerable countries, as well as to stimulate greater ambition whenever possible.

So I hope that Paris will see a pathway for this commitment that is credible to all countries, and that efforts to assess the commitment are inclusive of all countries. That is the way to optimize climate impact, fairness and equity, and value for money.

I also hope that Paris can see the emergence of practical solutions on how this money could be invested, so that it becomes something that citizens across the world can understand. There is no inconsistency between a general principle that all developing countries need some form of assistance, and the idea that the specific nature of the assistance will differ and requires different instruments and mechanisms. I know that innovative solutions are emerging from the Commonwealth, especially around initiatives that deal with the specific circumstances of Small Island Developing States, Least Developed Countries and Vulnerable Countries. The Commonwealth has led before on matters like debt relief, so this heritage is showing through the continued evolution of these ideas, as well as through your sponsorship since 2013 of the Commonwealth Climate Finance Hub.

On the second issue, your support for an inclusive and rights-based approach to both the process and legal outcome of the Paris Summit could make the agreement fairer. An inclusive process is the key to ensuring a result that meets the needs of all countries and has the support of all

countries. Given the diversity of countries in the Commonwealth, you can look out for each other - to ensure that the voices and perspectives of smaller and less powerful countries are heard throughout the process that leads to a new agreement. Without this equity of process we will be unable to achieve an equitable outcome.

A measure of the success of the Paris Agreement will be the extent to which it meets the needs of all human beings regardless of where they live, their race, gender or socio-economic status. In these final days of negotiations for the new climate agreement I find myself referring more and more to Article 1 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights which states “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” An international climate agreement that respects human rights norms, including gender equality, will ensure the dignity and rights of current and future generations; they are after all the very people the agreement is mandated to protect.

So I urge you all to work with your colleagues to carry the human rights commitments your countries have already made into the Paris climate talks, to ensure that the values on which the UN was created, the values of the Commonwealth, are reflected in and guide the implementation of the Paris agreement.

I was pleased to note that earlier this week the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions adopted the St Julian Declaration on Climate Justice. I would like to commend the NHRIs for their contribution to climate action in their individual countries and in the context of cooperation within the commonwealth to promote climate justice. This Declaration joins the Geneva Pledge initiated by Costa Rica earlier this year as a practical and action oriented contribution to the linking of human rights and climate action.

When you strip away the jargon you see that climate action is about recognizing that there is no solution to climate change if up to three billion people, mainly women, still cook using dangerous and dirty energy sources. The black carbon that comes from this use of coal, charcoal and wood not only causes millions of deaths every year – it is also one of the main causes of climate change. There is no climate solution if the communities of forest countries are unable to

work with others to protect their forests, or if small holder farmers are not helped to find ways to move to sustainable practices. Together deforestation and agricultural practices are about a fifth of all greenhouse gas emissions. There is no solution if the hundreds of millions of people living in slums across the world cannot get access to affordable, sustainable food and energy. There are many more examples – but the central point is that we will need the empowerment of billions of people to unleash the energy, perspectives and ideas that will construct the aggregate climate solution we need.

Fortunately, there is the Lima to Paris Action Agenda, which involves actions by cities, on forests and land use, by business, civil society, faith-based groups and young people.

The Paris Climate summit is an enormous opportunity. It can consolidate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs to create an unprecedented wave of human empowerment which will not only solve the climate problem – but it will also deliver one of the most profound responses to global poverty and inequality ever seen. Addressing this inequality and giving hope of a better life for everyone is a cornerstone in building peace, managing migration and ending extremism.

Let me end with words from The Cure at Troy by Irish Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney:

History says, Don't hope
On this side of the grave,
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up
And hope and history rhyme.