



Madeleine K. Albright Global Development Lecture

Aspen Meadows 3 August 2016

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

Thank you for the invitation to give the Madeleine K. Albright Global Development Lecture this year during our annual Brookings Blum get together at Aspen. Thank you also for suggesting that it should be on the topic dearest to my heart, climate justice. I am very pleased to take part in a lecture series in honour of a woman who always supported women – even if her witty way of putting this caused her some grief with some younger women. I am old enough to know and appreciate the early battles which were hard to fight – nationally and internationally. Madeleine was a pioneer and champion of the rights of women and girls – and still is. In her honour I am wearing a large brooch this evening as I know Madeleine likes to communicate in this way!

Climate change is of course a global development issue. This is because the traditional model of development we have used to date, based on the consumption of fossil fuels, has caused human induced climate change. Climate change is now undermining, and risks reversing, hard won development gains. Addressing climate change is a truly global issue – it can only be solved by all countries acting together, motivated not only by solidarity but also by self-interest.

Today, I would like to reflect on the time we find ourselves in and the platform this creates for global development, justice and cooperative action. As I travelled in the last few weeks from the Middle East and Europe, to the US and Latin America, most recently Honduras, I was struck,

as I am sure you all are, by the moment of history we are in. Violence, injustice and natural disasters are all taking their toll. It is hard as observers of the news and social media not to be worried and afraid as this deluge of suffering, hate and intolerance undermines human dignity. It is no wonder that people are fearful when the messages they hear from some of their leaders and in certain media outlets seem to threaten their way of life or tell them there is something to be scared of.

Here in the US the culture of fear is perceptible in the media and in everyday conversations. People are being told, directly and indirectly, to fear other people, including even their neighbours, or their workmates and their school friends. The value of diversity which is dear to the United States is becoming fragile as the focus moves to what makes us different rather than what makes us similar. Fear is the opposite of freedom. Fear causes us to look inwards rather than outwards and as a result to close doors on ourselves and the rest of the world.

Whether in France, Germany, here in the US or in Syria - this is the very moment when fear must not become fatalism.

I was struck by President Obama's address at the White House Summit on Global Development last month – by his appreciation of how lucky we are to live in this moment. Although he lives hour by hour with the atrocities happening around the world – he is still able to put into perspective the progress we have made in the world. He reminded his audience of how lucky US citizens are to live in the most peaceful, most prosperous, most progressive era in human history.

When I look at the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights I have similar thoughts – we have come a long way. We have shared values as an international community that bind us together and that hold us accountable to each other. We have found ways to cooperate, we have lifted many lives out of poverty, we have avoided conflict and we have secured peace. But we are not all the way there yet – and recent events remind us of how fragile that progress is. How hard we need to continue to work- to both protect and accelerate that progress, while sharing it more fairly – so that all people have equal opportunity.

When shocks occur that rock our established ways of doing things we realise how vulnerable we may be. So whether it is Brexit in UK, the criminal acts of terrorism in France, the refugee crisis in Europe, the shootings in Orlando or the impacts of El Nino around the world – we are reminded that although nothing stays the same we must live by the values that hold us all together.

The world watches as events unfold here in the US. As a major power and a pioneer of democracy, the responses the US takes to violence and hatred on its shores have a ripple effect on other parts of the world. The US has a strong set of values to guide it through difficult times – ranging from liberty and equality to diversity and truth. The challenge is to remain true to these values and the principles of the rule of law, accountability and human rights, no matter how great the real or perceived threat.

After all, fear paralyses us while hope and determination can drive us forward.

I see evidence of that hope in the transformational vision spelled out last year in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It calls for a collective journey shared by all the nations of the world to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources.

This new agenda envisages a *‘world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity’*. This is the world we can create; building on what we have achieved to date and being determined to forge a bright future for generations to come.

Justice, dignity and the rule of law are the values that can shape a resilient world – able to withstand shocks and outbreaks of violence. Able to protect citizens and to uphold rights.

Agenda 2030 is also fully cognisant of the links between climate change and sustainable development – as is the Paris Agreement on climate change adopted last year. We cannot have peaceful and prosperous societies without taking urgent action on climate change. We know that the commitments made by most countries before Paris to take action on climate change are insufficient, and leave us on a pathway to at least 3°C warming above pre industrial levels, which would be a catastrophe. It is sad to see the extent of climate change denial still in this country, faced as we are with an existential threat to human security. As parents and grandparents, we need to stress the urgency of prompt ratification of the Paris Climate Agreement and the implementation of ambitious commitments by all countries.

This is also an issue for young people. I am glad to see students here in the US so active in seeking divestment from fossil fuels and re investment in renewables. It is heartening to see their numbers growing and their interest in our shared ecosystem burgeoning.

When we look at the world today and see the challenges of inequality, poverty and injustice – we have to face the fact that climate change is already having a multiplier effect on these problems. Last week in Honduras I saw the impacts of El Niño on food production and the acute malnutrition that children, in particular, are suffering as a result. El Niño is a natural cyclical event aggravated by climate change. Droughts like those caused by El Niño will become more common in a climate affected world. That is unless we take urgent action to reduce emissions and keep warming well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and strive for 1.5°C.

The injustice of climate change is that those who are most vulnerable in society, no matter the level of development of the country in question, will suffer most. This means that people who are marginalised or poor, women, indigenous communities, slum dwellers and migrants will be disproportionately affected by climate impacts.

Here in the US the first official climate displaced people are being resettled from Isle de Jean Charles in Louisiana to drier land. The resettlement programme is the first allocation of federal tax dollars to move an entire community struggling with the impacts of climate change. The communities that are being asked to move voluntarily come from two American Indian tribes that have lived on the island for generations. Some members of the community can't wait to leave – beaten down by hurricanes and repeated flooding as well as salt water intrusion and erosion. However, others can't bear to consider leaving their home- the cemetery that holds their ancestors and their roots in a place that is theirs; when the alternative is to settle in place that inevitably belongs to someone else.

The federal plan provides the money needed to move the 60 or so people living on the island. But this isn't just a question of money. It is a question of rights, of human dignity, of cultural heritage and of pride. The challenges encountered in moving just 60 people from Isle de Jean Charles are a harbinger of what lies ahead. The UN University Institute for Environment and Human Security and the International Organisations for Migration estimate that 50-200 million people could be displaced by climate change by 2050 – far exceeding the numbers moving in the current migration crisis around the Mediterranean.

But, just as fear must not become fatalism in the US context, fear must not dominate the international dialogue on climate action. In recent years the narrative on climate change has changed, from one of doom and gloom to one of purpose and opportunity. For example, many business leaders have stopped seeing climate actions and the need to reduce carbon emissions, as a threat to business. Instead that can see the benefits in terms of reduced risk and the potential for innovation, new technologies and greater efficiency through low carbon alternatives. This change in narrative - as climate technologies have been developed and the benefits of sustainable development have been better understood - is one of the reasons why an ambitious agreement was possible in Paris last year. B was there in force, and for more ambitions.

The next step is to ratify and then implement the provisions of the Paris Agreement and indeed the closely related 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This is something all counties are committed to doing, and for the US that means action at home as well as overseas. Let me recommend a Principle of Climate Justice that needs to be at the heart of this effort. A principle that can help to ensure that policies adopted and actions delivered are inclusive, equitable and transformative. The Principle is 'Ensure that Decisions on Climate Change are Participatory, Transparent and Accountable'.

Let's start with participation. Participation is a human right and it is the basis of good policy making. By consulting with and ensuring the active participation of all relevant stakeholders in decision making, there is a greater likelihood of actions being supported and successful. This principle is informing the current work of the Department for Housing and Urban Development in Louisiana. After two failed previous attempts to relocate the community from Isle de Jean Charles, they are now actively consulting with and listening to the local community so that a resettlement plan can be designed which meets their needs. More participation means more buy in from the people you need to have on board to enact a policy. It also protects rights – as through participation people can voice their concerns about other rights and propose measures to mitigate risks.

Civil society is an important actor in participatory decision making alongside government and business. Civil society represents the views of citizens and enables them to engage in shaping the communities and countries they live in. The current trend globally to close civil society space is very worrying because it reduces participation, removes citizens from decision making and deprives people of their voice.

Since January 2012 more than 100 laws have been proposed or enacted by governments aimed at restricting the registration, operation and funding of Non –Governmental Organisations¹. The slow creep of a shrinking space for civil society is happening in democratic and autocratic states alike. There is speculation and research into why this is happening. Proposed drivers include the global loss of democratic momentum, the rising power of political systems and leaders

¹ Challenging the Closing Civil Society Space. Funders Initiative for Civil Society.

opposed to universal values, and the fear of some power holders that civil society will challenge too much and hold entrenched regimes to account.

We see again that fear can lead even the most democratic governments to clamp down on rights like the right to protest, the right to assemble and freedom of expression. In an increasingly globalised and connected world – leaders who are fearful of their own people, or of people from outside their borders – risk reacting in negative ways that paralyse open debate and deprive people of their rights.

Civic space has a legitimate value and in an increasingly interconnected world we see new ways in which people can organise and mobilise for change. Power holders need to realise that by allowing citizens a voice, even a dissenting voice, they don't diminish their own power. In fact they may gain insights that make them a stronger leader. The shutting down of civil society voice is a real risk, not just to human rights and justice but also to development and peace and security. Bringing civil society to the table brings new ideas and innovation, and gains the support of the people needed to actually implement change. It may have surprised many of you that my country, Ireland would be the first country in the world to approve same sex marriage in a popular referendum. How did it happen? It happened because civil society organisations combined with young people and campaigned for this change. Young Irish voters, men and women, gay and straight, came back to Ireland at their own expense to vote, and saw this as a human rights issue. Conversations about belonging to society and being respected within society took place at dinner tables and on the campaign trail between the generations. Parents and grandparents voted 'Yes' for their children to belong, to belong to a society which recognises that diversity can tip the balance towards equality. By saying 'Yes' to equality; diversity and respect for human dignity won over fear and division.

An open civic space is also the key to accountability. Accountability describes rights and responsibilities that exist between people and institutions that affect their lives. It means establishing the rule of law and a just social and political order.

Accountable institutions are transparent and answerable to the people they serve. Civil society plays an important role holding institutions to account for the actions they take and fail to take. When accountability works, citizens are able to make demands on powerful institutions, state and non-state, and ensure that those demands are met. This builds trust.

Accountability is a growing theme in global development as well as a principle of climate justice. At the international level, Agenda 2030, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement all affirm the importance of accountability and transparency. Through Agenda 2030 leaders commit to be accountable to their citizens. In the Paris Agreement countries commit to greater transparency at the international level so that they can be accountable to each other for the actions they are taking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide climate finance. None of this is strong enough, or enforceable enough but it is there and can be worked on.

Likewise in the world of business a growing emphasis on transparency is assisting citizens and civil society to hold companies to account for their actions. Tools like Environmental Social and Governance (ESG) reporting, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and human rights and the Principles for Responsible Investment are promoting good practices and assist businesses to maintain and strengthen their social contract with customers.

So transparency, accountability and participation build trust in our systems and promote good governance. In the face of the uncertainty and anxiety facing our world today, these principles enable citizens to be informed and to contribute to solutions. This empowers them and makes them feel in control rather than anxious or fearful. Now is the time, as the world faces one of the greatest transitions - away from fossil fuels powered and inequitable development to a new mode of inclusive sustainable development - to make all people part of the solution and not to alienate some of them due to perceptions that they are part of the problem. We need a just transition which cares about securing the future for former coal workers, for example.

At times of change and anxiety such as people around the world are experiencing now, the challenge is to get people engaged, positively, for a better future, rather than to exclude them or let them withdraw. Being engaged is empowering. Being empowered to engage is critical. When people are empowered they can demand dignity and defend their rights.

Realising the right to participation is fundamental to an inclusive and healthy society. And inclusive diverse and tolerant societies are what is needed to deliver the transformation we need to sustainable development and a zero carbon, climate resilient world. Governments cannot achieve the SDGs or implement the Paris Agreements' goals without the actions of their citizens.

So, as we read our newspapers, scroll through twitter and risk feeling like the world is about to tumble down around us – let's not be afraid. Instead let's get engaged and create open societies that allow people to be involved, empowered and free.

On this day 102 years ago in 1914, Germany declared war on France and the next day World War I began when Britain declared war on Germany. The world learned then, and again during World War II, how brutal life can be. We vowed never again. We created the United Nations, we adopted the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and we agreed on the common values that bind the people of the world together and that can ensure mutual respect and bring peace. We need to call on those shared values now, aware as we are of our interdependence as global citizens, and use our shared values to shape a safer, fairer, more diverse and respectful world for present generations and those to come.

Climate justice reflects this intergenerational approach. It is based on hope, on respect for human rights and on the belief that by working together we can create a better future for present and future generations.

As I return home to Ireland later this week to spend some well overdue summer holidays with my grandchildren – I hope to instill in them a sense of wonder, of hope and of possibility. As parents and grandparents we shower our children and grandchildren with love and protect them from hate. They should be the focus of our decision making now; after all what we do or fail to do in the coming years shapes their future. We have to show them that at tough times it is love that conquers all and hate that paralyses.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I like the words of my dear friend Archbishop Desmond Tutu,

We are each made for goodness, love and compassion. Our lives are transformed as much as the world is when we live with these truths

He taught me a wonderful lesson when we were on a panel together in New York a few years ago. The audience was young people, busy on social media. Tutu is always energised in the company of young people, and he was pulled up by the moderator- a woman journalist- who asked "Archbishop Tutu, why are you such an optimist?" The Archbishop shook his head and responded: "Oh no, I am not an optimist - I am a prisoner of hope".

We must all be prisoners of hope in these difficult times, and take courage from the hopeful leadership given by Secretary Madeleine Albright, both when she held high office and ever since.

Thank you.