

Chatham House - Climate Change 2016

“Has the Game Changed?”

Keynote Address by Mary Robinson

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Institution of Civil Engineers, London

Good afternoon - it is a pleasure to be back again with Chatham House.

It was also a pleasure to listen to the opening addresses from two great women and two of my great friends. In years to come, both Patricia Espinosa and Laurence Tubiana will take their rightful places in the history books as champions of climate justice.

Because of their work, and the work of thousands of other people, 2015 was the year when we all lifted our sights towards achieving a vision of immense scale – to eradicate extreme poverty from our world, to generate sustainable economic growth for all, and to combat climate change. Much progress was made throughout the year – not just the Paris Climate Agreement but also July’s Financing for Development outcomes and September’s Agenda 2030 with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

But as we ask ourselves “has the game changed?”, we must also recognise that the international agreements of 2015 do not yet change much for the billions of people around the world who are most in need of the commitments set out in the agreements.

If your daily life is dominated by the search for clean water so that your children can be healthy and strong enough to go to school; if you are an expectant mother who needs access to qualified medical personnel to help your new-born survive; if you are an unemployed youth seeking a job that can provide you with the means to live as well as the personal

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fulfilment that comes with making a contribution to your family and community's wellbeing; if you are a migrant fleeing war or the ravages of increasing climate change – you are unlikely to yet see the Sustainable Development Goals or the Paris Climate Agreement as being relevant to improving you or your family's wellbeing, or to making the world a better place.

So while we ask the question: “has the game changed?”, we must also be asking “how much more does the game need to change?”.

The good news is that the Paris climate agreement has been ratified in record time and will come into effect before COP22 in Marrakech in November.

Yet as has been discussed earlier today, we are still far from being on a trajectory to a safe world. The foundations of Paris are fragile ones, and we don't have much time to strengthen and improve them.

Getting onto the safe trajectory, and staying there, is partly about finalizing rulebooks and procedural questions for COPs – these things are vitally important and must be done extremely quickly. But if you are one of the 75 million people who live about one metre above sea level, you don't want to listen to procedural explanations about rule books. You want the international community to act before you are forced to flee from your home.

This means achieving a world with temperature increases below 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels, and as close as possible to 1.5 degrees. And all the while also achieving the other SDGs and eliminating extreme poverty and inequality.

I know that there are many people, perhaps including some here today, who believe that to talk in these terms is merely aspirational.

I disagree.

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For two reasons. First of all, the Paris Climate Agreement commits the whole world to the climate targets. So they are now requirements of an international treaty and no longer just aspirations. But secondly, and more importantly, we cannot lower our sights because to do so would mean ignoring the suffering of hundreds of millions of people in this and future generations. This reality informs the principles of climate justice which guide my Foundation's work by putting people at the centre of all our work on climate change.

More ambition is needed.

And in line with the principles of climate justice I spoke of, I suggest there are three basic points which can help us to rise to the challenge. First of all, we need to understand the true meaning of scale. Second, we need to understand the power of inclusiveness. And third, we need to understand the importance of solidarity.

First, scale. It is very important to remember that our goal is not just to expand the low carbon economy from where we are today. We should celebrate progress – plummeting technology costs, removal of fossil fuel subsidies, cleaner supply chains for agricultural products, more decoupling of GDP growth from emissions, and so on. But we must not lose sight of the fact that each of these is just part of a bigger solution and they do not on their own get us to the targets of below 2 degrees and as close as possible to 1.5.

That is why we need to strengthen, and actively utilize, the architecture now being put in place, including the system of INDCs and the rules around transparency that are embedded in the Paris Agreement. The INDCs were a voluntary process, but increasing their ambition in future revisions will be legally binding on countries. National ambition needs to be lifted through a transparent process, while cities, businesses and civil society activists all need to become more familiar with the options for achieving genuine scale within their own contexts.

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Second, inclusiveness. Inclusiveness is often seen simply as a moral imperative. Indeed, it was the moral dimensions of climate change that inspired me to set up my foundation on climate justice.

But inclusiveness is not just a moral imperative. It is also a hard-headed pre-requisite for effective climate action.

There is literally no solution to climate change without the peoples, businesses and governments of the developing world leading the way. This is because most of the energy supply, buildings and transport infrastructure that has yet to be built, as well as most of the world's agriculture and major forests, are in the developing world.

The good news is that there is very strong leadership across the developing world – in small countries and large. I saw it when I visited Samoa to attend the Small Island Developing States Summit in 2014, I saw it when I was in Fiji just over a year ago for the Pacific Islands Development Forum. In 2015, Costa Rica achieved 99% renewable energy. Colombia is aiming to achieve net zero deforestation, and catalyse a suite of low carbon investments across the country – all within the context of a very tough road to ending decades of war. I could give many more examples – but in all cases they are following home-grown solutions towards a model of sustainable development that no rich country has yet achieved.

So I was delighted to see Giza Gaspar Martins speak earlier this morning - and I know that Minister Teklemariam will have many insights to share about how Ethiopia is working to be a middle-income country, achieve ambitious greenhouse gas emissions reductions and invest in renewable energy by 2025, despite its backdrop as one of the world's poorest countries, with 74% of its population currently living without access to energy.

But I respectfully suggest that Giza and the Minister's presence poses a challenge to everybody here.

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There is a stellar line up of speakers and participants today and tomorrow. But I think we have to acknowledge that most of us here are from developed countries.

I say this not to be critical – after all, this meeting is taking place in London. But it is typical of gatherings that discuss climate action. And it means that we are missing out on a whole array of solutions that could be unlocked through greater inclusiveness.

But if we recognise the need to listen to, and genuinely understand, the perspectives, ideas and proposals that are coming from the developing world, new ground opens up in the search for the path to 1.5 degrees. Innovations and proposals are emerging from across the developing world. From Government Treasuries, from the boardrooms of companies, from villages and communities and civil society organisations – and perhaps most encouragingly of all, from the 3.5 billion people currently under 30.

Recognising the opportunity presented by these innovations and proposals leads us to the third point I wanted to raise today—the importance of solidarity and our shared responsibility to support climate action everywhere, including through solidarity on finance.

The overall financing gap for implementing the SDGs is about US\$2.5 trillion per year. There are no realistic scenarios where this can come just from domestic resources in the developing world – and this is part of the reason why the international community must meet both its commitment to ensure Overseas Development Assistance totalling 0.7% of GNI, and its commitment to raise US\$100 billion in annual climate finance by 2020.

We may be on the cusp of a far greater understanding of how the US\$100 billion in climate finance can create new opportunities. For a long time, developing countries have expressed frustration at being excluded from the work to analyse how the US\$100 billion can be a catalyst for trillions more of investment in climate action - so it is heartening to see the priority given to addressing this by the French and Moroccan COP Presidencies. Hopefully

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post-COP22, we will see meaningful progress, recognised by all, on how to reach the US\$100 billion.

But nobody will claim that domestic resources, ODA and climate finance alone can meet the SDG financing gap. Rather, we need systemic change in the international architecture to also catalyse large scale flows in private finance towards the SDGs. US\$2.5 trillion per year may seem like a lot of money – but it is important to put that in perspective. For example, Citigroup, one of the world’s largest financial institutions, moves US\$3 trillion through its systems every day.

This solidarity is not about charity or aid – it is enlightened self-interest for all involved. It is in everyone’s interests that the developing world is able to build low carbon energy, transport and urban infrastructure, while also pursuing sustainable agriculture and forestry practices – otherwise, these activities will become unacceptably high sources of emissions.

So to conclude, I believe that we have the chance to turn the vision of 2015 into the realities of the years ahead.

And more than that: we can show how multilateralism and respect for others is the way to solve shared problems. In a world where there is too much talk about building walls and not enough about building bridges, climate action can provide a shining beacon for how collaboration and respect work better than isolationism and aggression.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for an approach that “reaches the furthest behind first”, and the Paris Agreement commits us to prioritising the most vulnerable countries and people. These calls should always be in our minds. They can help us to remember why 2015 mattered - not because we have yet guaranteed the future we want for people everywhere - but because we created foundations on which we now need to build.

Thank you very much.