

*Women, Gender Equality and Climate Justice*

**Mary Robinson**

**European Parliamentary Hearing 25 April 2017**

**This is an important Hearing on Women, Gender Equality and Climate Justice. I am pleased to be invited to the European Parliament to join today's proceedings. We will focus on issues that are close to my heart, women, gender equality and climate justice. We need the FEMM Committee and other Committees of the European Parliament to ensure that women, gender equality and climate justice are central to the EU's implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement.**

**We still underestimate the gender dimensions of climate change even though work is at last going on at the UNFCCC level to develop a Gender Action Plan. My own eyes were opened during last year when I travelled to countries particularly affected by climate change as the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy on El Nino and climate, and witnessed the severe drought caused by El Nino. I visited Honduras and travelled to what is called the 'dry corridor' of Central America which is traditionally affected by El Nino. This time it was so much worse because the communities were already weakened by the disruption of climate change. With support from a Honduran women's organisation, I met a group of women from several local villages. Sitting under a large tree, I listened and saw the pain in their faces. One woman asked me 'How do you live without water?' But having aired their problems, these women showed me how they were determined to become more resilient. They had a lock on the well in the village, and were rationing the water. Different crops were being grown as maize is not a good crop in drought, and they were growing vegetables for better nutrition.**

**Their story is the essence of our debate here in the European Parliament. Women are more affected by climate change because of their traditional roles in the community, but they are not victims, they are increasingly agents of change. In my Foundation, we have**

supported the importance of including grassroots women and local and traditional knowledge in the development of the global gender action plan. In this regard I look forward very much to hearing from Jannie Staffansson of the Saami Council and to benefiting from her experience at the cold face of climate change.

It is important to remember the EU's commitment to the Paris Agreement and in particular, the commitment to acknowledge when taking action to address climate change, to respect, promote and consider our respective obligations on human rights and on gender equality which are key principles of Climate Justice.

Climate change is the biggest injustice of our time. The injustice of climate change is that those who are most vulnerable to climate change and least responsible for causing it are those who will suffer most. Beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius, many people's lives, livelihoods, homes and connection to the world as they know it will be changed forever. By placing climate justice at the heart of climate action, a demand is made for greater ambition from countries to phase out carbon emissions and for protection of global citizens from the worst human rights impacts of climate change.

In the run up to Paris, the EU played a crucial role and was part of the ambitious action demonstrated in Paris, committing with other developed countries climate finance of 100 billion dollars per year by 2020. The EU has agreed that at least 20 per cent of its budget for 2014 -2020 – as much as €180 billion - should be spent on climate change-related action in Europe, including mitigation and adaptation. This demonstrates the EU's commitment to support developing countries, and EU citizens, to adapt to the current impacts of climate change and invest in renewable technologies for the future.

As we know climate change is not just impacting people in developing countries; it is also impacting society here, at home, in Europe. Extreme weather events are happening more often and more severely than before. Different regions of Europe will be impacted

**differently and perhaps more important to note, different people in our society will be impacted differently and unequally.**

**A key principle of climate justice that can help to ensure that policies developed and actions delivered are inclusive, equitable and transformative is to ‘Ensure that Decisions on Climate Change are Participatory, Transparent and Accountable’. Let me first focus on participation.**

**In order to ensure that the implementation of the Paris Agreement is equitable, fair and inclusive, the EU must ensure that the voices of those who are disproportionately affected are heard. Sharing knowledge is essential for climate change action and it is when we listen to and learn from those on the frontlines that we can act accordingly.**

**Including women’s voices in climate change decision-making processes is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart and sustainable thing to do. My Foundation, in partnership with UN Women, has provided evidence through our report ‘The Full View’ that demonstrates that when women are involved in the design, planning and implementation of climate actions, positive benefits are created for men and women and the planet. Women such as Ran Nguyen, a farmer in the Bing Ding province in central Vietnam, who like many farmers in rural Vietnam, has suffered due to increasingly frequent and severe storms associated with climate change that have resulted in loss of life and livelihoods. Ran participated in a project implemented by UN Women, the Government of Vietnam and the Vietnam Women’s Union, to build the resilience of women and their communities to extreme climate events. As Ran put it herself “Thanks to good preparation... ..nobody in the village was killed or injured in last year’s storm season.”**

**Ran’s story demonstrates the importance of gender-responsive climate action where women farmers were given the opportunity to identify how they were affected by climate change and how they could become more resilient. Gender-responsive climate action**

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refers to identifying, reflecting on and implementing interventions that are needed to address gender biases and tackle climate change.

The EU must ensure that in the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement, it creates enabling environments for gender-responsive climate action. There are avenues within the UNFCCC where this can be achieved but let me focus on one, the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan which is to be mandated this year. Within the EU's submission to the Gender Action Plan, the EU mentioned its consideration of 'further action on promoting gender equality, empowerment of girls and women and gender responsive climate policies'. I welcome this intention of the EU and I would encourage that they go further and consider the creation of measures to overcome the barriers to gender balance under the UNFCCC and the creation of avenues for the participation of grassroots women.

'The Full View' report, produced by my Foundation and UN Women identified concrete steps that Parties can undertake to accelerate progress towards the goal of gender balance. Some of these key steps include recommendations such as setting incremental time bound targets, having dedicated resources to fund travel costs and capacity building for female delegates and the formation of a gender equality network.

The EU can support the right to participation through ensuring the creation of avenues where grassroots women can participate in discussions under the UNFCCC. Appropriate spaces should be created for a broad range of actors, including grassroots women to directly engage. Building capacity for both negotiators and grassroots women is important in the recognition of grassroots women's knowledge and to ensure meaningful and effective participation of grassroots women.

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Now let's look at accountability and transparency. There is evidence<sup>1</sup> that shows that through consulting with and ensuring meaningful participation of relevant stakeholders in decision making, there is a greater likelihood of actions being supported and successful. Unfortunately, civil society space is currently shrinking due to a global pattern of repression against civil society organizations. This space includes organizations working to defend economic, social, political, environmental, and cultural rights ensuring democracy is upheld. We must protect this important space within our society and within Europe.

Civil society is an important actor in participatory decision making alongside government and business. There is a resurgence in political participation and it is in this spirit I see the solution to the climate crisis. Indeed, I attended a March for Science myself last Saturday in Dublin to support and safeguard the scientific community and evidence-based policy which is a key element in climate justice. 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.

Through ensuring people and their rights are at the centre of the EU's implementation of the Paris Agreement, the EU will empower the voices that often go unheard and uphold the motto of the EU 'United in Diversity'. Those who are at the forefront of climate change must not be viewed as vulnerable victims but instead, agents of change. Placing people, and women in particular, at the centre ensures that we link human rights and sustainable development to create a world and a future that we all want and hope for.

In light of this, we can draw courage from the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu who taught me a wonderful lesson when we on a panel together in New York a few years ago.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Women's Participation: An Enabler of Climate Justice' 2015

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**Tutu was asked by the moderator, a woman journalist “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 the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement.**

**Thank you.**

**[ENDS]**