



Mary Robison Keynote Address

Plenary Session: Justice for the Planet and the People

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It is very nice to be back here at Ceres again. When I was last here in 2014 the Joan Bavaria Award was awarded for the first time to a woman religious person, Sister Pat Daly. So it is good to see that I am here at another first, this year the award is given posthumously to Rich Ferlauto, and I must say he is a deserving winner and congratulations to his wife Hillary.

There have been many changes since I was here last – not all good I may add. However we have made progress with some positive movements at the international level. As you know, in 2015 world leaders adopted two ambitious frameworks to set the world on course for a safer and more prosperous future for all. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, in conjunction with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development, offer the global community our best opportunity yet to avoid catastrophic climate change, end poverty and enable all people to live lives of dignity, underpinned by human rights. Importantly these frameworks identify a role for the private sector to be involved in delivering on these agreements if we are to meet the ambitious targets set out in the SDGs and the Paris Agreement.

These frameworks give the world a good opportunity to achieve peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. As my good friend and renowned Irish Poet Seamus Heaney once said “If you have the words, there's always a chance that you'll find the way”; well we have the words we now just need to make sure we find the way.

I am here today wearing two hats, as president of my Foundation and in my role as an Honorary Member of the B Team, but the message is the same. I am here to talk about climate justice. Climate change is affecting us all – Boston, where we happen to be gathered today, like many other coastal cities is extremely vulnerable to the rising sea levels as a result of climate change. The Climate Ready

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Boston report clearly demonstrated how vulnerable this city, its businesses, and its residents are to the impacts of climate change. According to the report business interruption impacts from sea-level rise are projected to total nearly \$250 million in annualized losses by the mid- to late-twenty-first century, in addition to \$1.4 billion in annualized physical damage, stress factors, and displacement costs¹. Climate change is increasing risks across the globe, not just in developing countries but to economies, businesses and infrastructure.

However the situation is most acute for people living in situations of poverty, marginalisation and vulnerability – in city slums, island atolls and drought or flood prone areas. People who will suffer disproportionately from the effects of climate change are the ones who are contributing the least to the changing climate, and have the fewest resources and the least agency to protect themselves and their communities. That is why my Foundation works on climate justice. Climate justice links human rights and development to achieve a human-centred approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its resolution equitably and fairly.

If we fail to act on climate change, extreme weather and conflicts over food and water will make life even worse for the nine billion or so people living on the planet in 2050. It is true the business case for action is now undeniable, and many of you here in this room are progressing on your commitments to reduce emissions whilst demonstrating the cost savings, risk mitigation, reputational benefits and new markets that can be accessed by taking climate action. Investment capital has also begun the giant shift necessary to fuel this transition. Yet despite these efforts, the scale of this response does not meet the urgency of the challenge. Most of commitments made by the global business community are promises to be kept, rather than a proven track record of the innovation, courage and tenacity needed to reach zero emissions by 2050.

It stands to reason then that business has a role, in fact a responsibility, to manage climate risks – and not just for its shareholders and workers - but also for the wider community the business operates in. Business interacts with people all along the supply chain, and operates in communities that are affected by climate change. Business sells goods and services to people living in a climate affected world. So managing climate risk goes beyond risk assessments to building resilience to climate impacts more broadly in the economy and society.

We anticipate that the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel Climate Change's Special Report on 1.5 Degrees will reveal the large gap between our current actions and what is needed to stay well

¹ CLIMATE READY BOSTON FINAL REPORT (2016)
https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/20161207_climate_ready_boston_digital2.pdf

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below 2°C, aiming for the much safer target of 1.5°C above pre-industrial global temperature. So we can and must do better.

There are however many positive actions taking place in the real economy. Green businesses, including the renewable energy sector are growing at a rapid rate. Bloomberg New Energy Finance Report, released in March, stated in most places, wind and solar are becoming cheaper than coal by 2023. This is to be celebrated, but we must also call on these new sectors to take responsibility for building a more inclusive economy.

Many of you will be aware of the Global Climate Action Summit taking place in California in September. I know Mindy Luber and Ceres colleagues are leading the charge on encouraging the transformative climate investments required to reach the trillion dollars a year in clear investment needed to make the transformation to achieve the Paris Agreement. I hope the investors in the room will be seeking out Mindy over the coming days to make your contributions!

But our actions to mitigate climate change must also be just, and consider the impact on jobs and human rights. It is not always clear how a failure to integrate human rights into climate action can undermine people's rights. Worryingly, figures from Business & Human Rights Resource Centre show that just because climate action is good for the planet does not mean it is always good for people. Since 2015, the Centre has approached companies 128 times to respond to allegations of human rights abuse associated with renewable energy projects, including land grabs and displacement, violations of the right to free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples, harm to livelihoods, and violence against communities and rights defenders. 106 of these requests to companies to respond have been since 2010. More than 50% of allegations the Resource Centre has received relate to projects in Central & South America and 28% in Asia. Whilst not questioning the need for a rapid transition, business and investors in the room should take heed to such cases - from a moral standpoint but also from a business standpoint, as such cases undermine a license to operate and cause costly delays.

As opportunities arise in this transition to sustainable development, it is imperative that investors and businesses protect human rights in their investments, operations and supply. Renewable energy companies need to understand their supply chains and engage in human rights due diligence throughout the life of a project. They also need to work with local communities to increase affordable access to energy and share project benefits. Business and investors should deliver a just transition to a low carbon economy that respects human rights. Although there are no specific standards for the renewable energy industry, they should follow globally recognised standards like the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).

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This is particularly true for the inclusion of women in the responses to climate change. The transition to a low carbon economy must empower women as actors in building resilience to climate impacts. These impacts are different for women and men – women are likely to bear a greater burden due to existing gender inequalities and different roles in society. In many countries, women are at the forefront of the injustices caused by climate change.

At the same time, women are often the leaders with the solutions at all levels. While we are making progress we have more work to do to get women in the board rooms. Christiana Figueres, has highlighted the links between progress on gender equality and climate change, and how a greater presence of women in the boardroom and in senior leadership can help increase the corporate focus on climate change. So getting women in the board room is not just good for people but for the planet also.

Although large shifts will be necessary in the energy sector, all sectors - from consumer goods to manufacturing will be able identify where new skills and knowledge will be needed to ensure their business thrives in the green economy. The transition will look different in different sectors and geographies, and of course will intertwine with co-current economic transitions, such as automation. We need to make sure this transition is just and fair for all; we need to do this in a fair and equitable way. We cannot leave anyone behind.

I co-chair the B Team's Net Zero Working Group with David Crane. In 2015 the B-Team set the ambitious target to reach zero emissions by 2050 the climate justice way with just transition. The companies in the working group have set a science-based target as they pledge to phase out all greenhouse gas emissions by January 2050.

Members of the B Team Net Zero group have committed to ensuring their transition plans account for the positive and negative impacts on workers and communities, and that they commit to working in partnership with stakeholders to ensure the transition is just and fair. They have also agreed to, and are adopting and rolling out, the International Labour Organisation Guidelines for a Just Transition. Without proper planning we risk leaving people behind who should be recognised for the contribution they have made to building the economies of our industrialized world. This can also impact negatively on communities who depend on these workers - leading to anxiety and resistance to change.

The B Team have been working with power companies and large manufacturers to create 'just transition' guidance which recommends businesses work in dialogue with their workers and unions to identify the multiple parts of their business that will have to adapt whilst decarbonising, and deduce

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scenarios for how these changes will affect their workforce. The B Team recommends multiple solutions for insuring a just transition, including the redeployment and reskilling of workers.

Central to a successful transition will be dialogue and participation. Enel, an Italian electricity company, is a good example of this. It employs over 60,000 people and has committed to decarbonize its energy mix by 2050, meaning it will close over 13 GW of coal power stations in Italy. It had a social dialogue with its workers that created a just transition agreement, covering retention, redeployment, reskilling and early retirement for elderly workers.

I am confident that if we put our mind to it business can ensure the green businesses of tomorrow build an inclusive economy. Competitive playing fields and fast growth has meant that in some countries the renewable energy industry is not producing fair wage jobs that live up to international labour standards, including the right to unionisation. This, marrying with other changes in what is becoming known as ‘the future of work’ is concerning, and has the potential to destabilize these industries in the long-term. We have an obligation to make sure this is not the case. As private investors in green industries - approximately \$350 billion/year is invested globally in renewables and 90% of finance for renewables came from private sources in 2015/2016 - you should seek disclosure from companies on labour standards. Frameworks like the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures can be helpful for integrating social justice criteria into corporate disclosures. And the ClimateAction100+ campaign, aimed at securing commitments from corporate boards and senior management on board oversight of a credible transition to the low carbon economy, will be another opportunity for investors to use their influence for more equitable outcomes of the energy transition.

As large corporate buyers of renewable energy, some of you in the room have 100% renewable energy commitments, you can pledge to only buy from suppliers/owners that can document good union jobs in construction and operation of facilities. As producers of renewable energy, you can commit to building energy projects that supply good union jobs in manufacturing, construction and operation.

I would like to digress slightly at this point to talk about another matter that is close to my heart – climate displacement. My Foundation has been working on this for the last number of years and it is an area where I see a role for business in developing options and livelihoods for people who have been displaced, or are in the process of being displaced by climate change.

The global community is currently engaged in a negotiation for a Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration which will build a set of international policies and mechanisms to better

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understand, engage with and facilitate migration. As part of this process it is expected that migration driven by the impacts of climate change will be included.

Business has a key role to play in this process, and will be impacted by its outcomes. If you aren't already involved I would encourage you to engage. In its current draft the compact urges countries to implement the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights while opening up better pathways for job creation and a reduction in migrant exploitation in host countries. These are issues I hope that business can get behind, and support States as they negotiate this complex agreement.

Circular migration, the process of migrating for seasonal or time sensitive roles and then returning to ones home, is a tool that has been utilised by communities for generations, as a response mechanism to environmental degradation, and the same is true now of climate change. However for it to be an effective tool for communities it must be designed well and be free of exploitation.

When done well circular migration can have a positive impact on communities and their environment. For example the 'Temporary and Circular Labour Migration' Programme, implemented between Columbia and Spain with support of the Union de Pagesos de Catalunya and the International Organisation for Migration has demonstrated how a coming together of Governments with private enterprise and vulnerable communities can demonstrate successful outcomes. Over a three year period more than 3,000 farmers from ecologically degraded areas undertook migration under this programme to Spain. The migrants and their families then contributed to the restoration of Zones affected by environmental change, supported by private co-financing and international cooperation. New knowledge and techniques learnt during their employment in Spain also contributed to the economies and environments of the impacted areas.²

Business should look at models such as this, and others that are being undertaken in Australia and New Zealand with Pacific Partners, and see how their engagement with the workforce could be used to benefit people on the front lines of climate change, build resilience and support environmental repair. Engaging your Governments with these opportunities, particularly while they are undertaking the negotiations of the Global Compact on Migration will demonstrate business' leadership in taking innovative approaches to the impacts of climate change.

Perhaps more than any other problem humanity has faced, climate change confronts us with the reality of our interdependence. In moving to a low carbon economy we have an opportunity to

² Ionesco et al, The Atlas of Environmental Migration p74

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eradicate extreme poverty, ensure access to clean energy for all and achieve equitable access to sustainable development. To deliver this action on the scale and in the timeframe required to avoid dangerous climate change, all stake holders – including national and local governments, municipalities, business, civil society and local communities – must find new ways of working together. We must ensure that all people in all countries are able to take part in the transition to zero carbon and zero poverty.

Let me end with the no nonsense words of a wonderful friend who taught me a lot about climate justice, and who knew how to protect food, forests and people from climate change: Wangari Maathai, who said,

“Until you dig a hole, you plant a tree, you water it and make it survive, you haven't done a thing. You are just talking”

Now is the time for us to stop talking and take action!

Thank you