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**"Responding to Global Crises: New Development Paths"**

**Statement**

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**Remarks by Mary Robinson**

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**UNCTAD Public Symposium**

**Responding to Global Crises: New Development Paths**

**Remarks by Mary Robinson**

**11 May 2010**

Thank you for the invitation to address you at the close of this important event. It's good to see many friends and colleagues here today. I regret not having been able to take part in more of your discussions over the past two days. You've clearly covered a wide range of critical issues.

I'm aware that your sessions have included not only analysis of problems and evidence-based critiques of 'business as usual' approaches. They also have generated specific recommendations about ways to do things differently, and better. So I look forward to an exchange after my brief remarks and I welcome this chance to learn more about the conclusions you've reached.

I should begin by noting that just a year ago, I was invited by the ILO to address the International Labour Conference here in Geneva which focused on the role of international labour standards in crisis response. As we met last June, the world economy appeared to be on the brink of depression. Global unemployment was soaring, the international financial system was near meltdown point, world trade was falling, and leading economists were warning that there seemed to be no light at the end of the tunnel.

A year later, we clearly aren't out of the woods yet. International stock markets have rebounded but remain volatile; projections indicate that the global economy is growing again, but it is evident that government responses thus far have only been a first step in overcoming a range of inter-linked crises.

What I want to focus on today, as you might guess, are the people at the center of these crises. As we know only too well, progress over the past decade on meeting existing commitments to promoting sustainable and people centered development has been limited at best. Many countries will not achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

On top of the impacts of the current crisis, all the analysis points not just to lack of progress in many countries on meeting overall targets, but also to a failure to address persistent problems of inequality and social exclusion. This means those most at risk and most vulnerable facing continuing poverty. We know as well that inequality and disparities are widening within a majority of countries around the world.

In examining global economic, aid, trade and climate change policies, many of us who work on the intersection of human rights, human development and human security find Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights particularly important: "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized." What does that mean in practice?

For a start, the need for greatly increased and more predictable development financing for countries lacking adequate domestic resources remains urgent. To take one example - Africa has still not received much of the billions of dollars in aid money promised by G8 leaders in 2005 nor

has the \$20 billion to support agriculture in poor countries promised last year in Italy materialized.

This is a reminder that we must find more effective means of holding governments to commitments made to the MDGs, in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and the Accra Agenda for Action. As you know, the Accra Agenda stresses that donors, both individually and collectively, need to provide and be accountable for clear commitments on future aid volumes. Equally important, partner countries must strengthen their efforts to provide the necessary leadership and the enabling environment to ensure effective use of development resources, including external aid.

A related subject I believe requires much greater attention in the time leading up to the UN high level review of the MDGs in September concerns the ongoing global jobs crisis. Last year's adoption by the ILO of a Global Jobs Pact was an important recognition of the need for employment creation to become a priority macro-economic goal in the same way as low inflation and sustainable public finances are today.

But as ILO Director General Juan Somavia has repeatedly stressed, national development strategies and international development cooperation are not yet mainstreaming approaches that increase productive employment and decent work as the primary route out of poverty, particularly in the informal economies of most developing countries. This requires not only increasing the capacity and policy space of governments to put job creation at the center of their economic policies, but also to ensure respect for labor rights and all human rights at work. It also requires expanding social dialogue to cover everyone, whether they are working in the formal or informal sectors and expanding social protection for all.

Development institutions cannot afford to overlook – indeed they must be able to interpret and act upon - global trends in finance and investment. Whether to face a rapid onset crisis like the global economic turmoil, or slower-onset crises like those of food security and climate change, we must be prepared, and we must help impoverished communities prepare and respond as well. Globalization has linked us inextricably, and those who hold power and influence must recognize their responsibilities and obligations in light of that.

Let me offer three broad ideas that I believe are key in advancing more specific recommendations and strategies.

**The first is the need to have a much sharper focus on what really constitutes sustainable development.** The current focus on aggregate economic growth as a main measure of progress must give way to a deeper commitment to the building blocks of lasting and people centered development. This includes tackling inequalities, ending discrimination and exclusion, and strengthening meaningful participation of all in development decision-making. For me, sustainable development is nothing less than enabling all people to live a secure life in which their equality in dignity and rights are protected.

The work of the Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor and subsequent resolutions by the General Assembly, point the way to empowering poor people under four pillars: access to justice, labour rights, land rights and business rights.

A great deal of the discourse and practice of development assistance – and even more so global trade and investment – still does not reflect an orientation towards empowering the poor. For example, while we recognize the need for the private sector to generate profits, too often it is not

generating commensurate decent work opportunities. Revenues are made, but where are they going? Foreign investment in Africa is growing, but how much of it is translated into real improvements at the level of people and households?

What we have learned from measuring progress on the MDGs over the past ten years is that if we don't build in a minimum social floor, many people will be left without access to health care, or education, or a decent livelihood. This is not only unjust but also jeopardizes chances at achieving sustainable economic development. If we don't specifically focus on supporting marginalized and at-risk populations, inequalities are going to increase. If we don't generate decent work opportunities in *every* region of *every* country, whether in the formal or informal economy, sustainable development will remain an unattainable dream.

The UN Independent Expert on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty and others are documenting an expanding number of examples of strong social protection systems that bolster resilience in the face of crisis. A recent study by Oxfam – echoing the studies of many other institutions, including The World Bank – indicates the importance of universal, permanent social protection systems to reduce the vulnerability of poor people to global crises. These are 'shock absorbers' that must be in place before crises hit.

In addition to expanding social protection systems, it is essential that we allow developing countries the policy space to maintain strong social systems in the face of economic shocks; that governments enforce respect for labor laws and all human rights at work; and that we support strong civil society institutions to hold governments and companies accountable.

Let me stress in this context a point that too often is not emphasized enough. Women's agency and voice in development is a key factor in enabling breakthroughs on all of the MDGs. We know that women and girls are a force for positive change in society, and that positive change comes about when women's and girls' rights are protected and when individuals are empowered and enabled to reach their potential.

But still we see too many examples of discrimination against women. Too many countries continue to under value their place in society. I've been deeply impressed by the networking and impact of women in the informal sector. SEWA, for example, has made the case for women in the informal sector being counted as part of the economy of India. This has reinforced their argument for social protection and removal of discrimination and barriers to productive work.

**A second idea I want to stress is the importance of accountability.** Accountability is a driver of positive societal change and one of the emerging global calls of the 21st century. It is critical to achieving results. Now is the time to demand *real* accountability at every level. There is no silver bullet, but clearly a key part of the way forward is in creating accountable partnerships between public officials and civil society in the service of development.

As I said earlier, that means developed countries must deliver on the aid promises they make. At the same time, developing country governments must be held accountable for creating and spending budgets that support development priorities – we know that the quality of aid spending is as important as the quantity of aid. And when it comes to private sector activity, the most important source of employment, governments must protect people's human rights including from abuse by non-state actors, companies must respect human rights and demonstrate that they do so, and there must be effective remedy when this does not happen.

The work of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation in creating an Ibrahim Index of Good Governance in the 53 countries of Africa is beginning to have impact by becoming a tool for civil society groups in each country to hold their governments accountable under the different indicators.

I should also note in this context that a Swiss supported initiative enabled a group of eminent human rights experts which I had the honor to co-chair to reflect on human rights challenges over the coming decade and put forward recommendations to the international community. One of these is for a new global fund to support access to justice including efforts to strengthen court systems, training of police, reform of prisons etc.

It is also important to stress that accountability can be achieved when different types of platforms are created. I was privileged to be part of a visit of women leaders to Zimbabwe two weeks ago, invited by women ministers there committed to making progress on securing democracy, human rights and sustainable development for all. I saw the innovation and resilience of women, particularly women in the rural areas, in providing for their families. I heard their collective acknowledgement of the need for healing and their acceptance that Zimbabweans have wounded each other.

It was a high point when the Zimbabwean women political leaders acknowledged to each other that violence against women had occurred and the nation must provide support urgently to survivors, as well as define ways to ensure justice and healing. This is a powerful form of accountability. And it is no surprise that I am convinced that strengthening women's leadership at every level is key to advancing peace, sustainable development and human rights in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**The third and final idea I would like to mention briefly concerns the notion of shared responsibilities.** What has been discussed here over the past two days embodies a recognition that we must embrace shared responsibilities across national boundaries.

For example, self-interest and short term thinking has plagued progress on global trade reform. It has meant that the inexorable expansion of global trade has too often resulted in worsening lives and livelihoods in developing countries – instead of providing the pathway out of poverty to which it potentially could contribute significantly.

When governments provide development assistance, but at the same time continue massive agriculture subsidies to their own farmers, they aren't promoting sustainable development for all. They are undermining development prospects and damaging the livelihoods of some of our most vulnerable sisters and brothers.

This form of narrow national self-interest plagues so much of our global discussions, and perhaps in no realm is this as alarming as in negotiations on climate change. We can protect the environment without undermining economic development. Mitigating climate change does not mean keeping those 1.6 billion people who lack electricity from getting electricity.

What we must do is learn from the many successes around the world where local economies *are* growing in ways that build on sustainable agriculture and forestry, and use of low-carbon technologies to expand energy for domestic and industrial uses. Entrepreneurs from China to Tanzania are innovating in these areas – and we have to bring their skills and energy to our development enterprise.

I was pleased to see that this symposium included a session on the need to bridge the climate justice and economic reform agendas. I look forward to learning more about your deliberations on this subject. My colleagues and I have been working with many others to broaden and strengthen the notion of climate justice – the idea that we must strive for equity in negotiations, that we hold common but differentiated responsibilities for coping with climate change, that we must be aware of those most vulnerable, and that we must work from the individual to the political level to tackle this threat. We will not make the required progress, though, until people in developed countries understand the role they play in reducing their carbon footprint and holding their governments and companies accountable for urgent action.

An understanding of our shared responsibilities for enabling development for everyone – and no less for building resilience to crises – is what we must nurture through our interactions and our global dialogue in every setting. Governments will make and uphold their global commitments only when their national constituencies make clear that they demand no less.

In conclusion, I believe we have, in this time of crisis, an opportunity to think anew about how ongoing efforts to achieve sustainable development should translate into practical policies and actions at every level. I'm convinced that human rights principles of accountability, participation, non-discrimination, and transparency can and should be an integral part of that debate. We shouldn't miss this opportunity to shape a more just and sustainable future for all people.

Thank you once again for inviting me to be here today. I look forward to hearing from you.