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A NEW CLIMATE DEAL BASED ON HUMAN PROGRESS AND JUSTICE

Regulatory failure led to the financial crisis – let us not make the same mistake on climate. The Kyoto protocol ends in 2012 and the global community must decide on a new agreement in Copenhagen 2009. This week a preparatory meeting is taking place in Poznan, Poland (1-12 December).

It is a very important meeting since it must pave the way for the agreement that we all hope to reach next year in Copenhagen. This agreement probably represents the world's last chance to bring climate change under control before it is too late.

But as the United Nations gathers the world's environment ministers in Poznan, the economic underpinnings for a muscular new treaty appear shakier than ever. The executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Yvo de Boer, recently said in an interview that, "yes things have changed but I don't think anyone will show the stupidity to focus on the short term and ignore the long-term issue because these decisions will be with us for 30 years." This statement also reflects the position of President-elect Barack Obama and the European Union. Both players have vowed to stick to commitments to cap emissions of carbon dioxide, arguing that government action and investing in new green technologies and renewable energy is a sustainable way to stimulate the economy and create new jobs, i.e. smart growth.

We have engaged as co-chairs in the climate initiative "Road to Copenhagen" which is an open and web-based network that calls not only for smart growth but for climate justice. We have committed to this initiative because we believe that the climate debate, and a new treaty, needs a more stringent focus on the human and social implications of climate change.

Most of the expected 2.6 billion rise in global population by 2050 will come from the poorest regions in the world. These are regions which have no convergent economic growth, are the most unstable politically and will be the hardest hit by climate change. Jefferey Sachs speaks about the paradox of a unified global economy and a divided global society where the poverty trap is self-reinforcing, not self-corrective. It is an alarming trajectory which constructs a "sustainability gap" that must be addressed. It is clear that we will not be able to mitigate climate change unless we address poverty.

Climate change is happening now. We can see that the poorest people and countries, those least responsible, are and will be hardest hit. For example, Africa as a continent is responsible for 3.8 percent of global CO2 emissions yet the impact of climate change will be unfairly devastating.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that adaptation costs for developing countries are in the tens of billions per annum - by 2050 they will amount to USD 86 billion per year. Absorbing the climate change impacts will hamper achievement of many of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG), including those on reducing poverty and child mortality and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

At best, 1 per cent of the resources required is currently available via the levy on the Clean Development Mechanism. Therefore, in order to ensure climate justice and meet the MDGs, we need to develop new innovative ways for capacity building and technology transfer. More importantly, we need ensure that the funds available for adaptation measures in developing countries are fair and proportionate - clearly reflecting the “polluter pays” principle, respecting human rights frameworks and gender equality, i.e. climate justice.

Prevention is better than cure. Acting early makes sense not least from an economic point of view. According to the 2007/2008 Human Development Report issued by the UNDP, every US dollar invested in pre-disaster risk management in developing countries can save USD 7. Hence, industrialized countries must take strong and immediate steps to increase assistance to the least developed countries for adaptation.

While mitigation is global, adaptation is local. This is why a new climate agreement must place adaptation on equal footing with mitigation. Furthermore, it must address the issue of climate justice and human rights in a development perspective.

Ultimately, achieving sustainability and a low-carbon economy will not only depend on technological innovation, but will require far ranging social and political innovation. Let us not forget that technology does not have the ability to eliminate poverty, respect human rights, ensure gender equality, stop climate change and build a sustainable society – people do. That is what the initiative Road to Copenhagen is about – and the agreement in Copenhagen must be about – climate justice for all peoples. The Nobel peace prize laureate Wangari Mathai puts it very simply: *“there can be no sustainable development without an equitable development; and there can be no equitable development without gender equality”*.

Mary Robinson, Former President of Ireland and Vice President of Club of Madrid

Margot Wallström, Vice President of the European Commission

Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway