



Opening Remarks
Consultative Group Meeting
Accra, Ghana
June 18, 2007

Mary Robinson

Co-Chairs, Honorable Members of Government, Parliament and the Ghanaian Public, Governor of the Central Bank, Delegations of Development Partners,

It is a great pleasure to return to Ghana in your Jubilee Year. I have just come from the World Economic Forum Regional Meeting in South Africa, where one of the great sons of Ghana, Kofi Annan, launched an Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa.

I realize that I address a gathering of individuals and institutions that have many years of experience to support and stimulate development in Ghana and elsewhere. I have spent many years on the same issues, both as President of Ireland, and during visits to many countries as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and more recently as President of Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative. I have also been working with the OECD-DAC group to support a greater emphasis on human rights, women's rights and the environment, in implementing the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in preparation of a major Summit here in Accra in September 2008, so I am looking at our challenges here with that lens as well.

I want to thank the World Bank Country Director Mats Karlsson in particular for inviting me today to share an outsider's perspectives and focus on human rights. It is the right time for Ghana to be proud of its accomplishments in terms of growth and development and also to be bold and visionary in how it moves forward, especially in facing its challenges in terms of creating more and better jobs, reducing inequalities, and improving outcomes in the social sectors.

As I have noted on previous visits, Ireland and Ghana have a lot in common, including a high level of migration. One of Ireland's defining features is also one of the key contributors to its success today – our diaspora around the world. Importantly, Ireland has found a way to cope with the movement of skilled people. Ireland's ability to take advantage of their capacity and skills in our economic and social development has been a key contributor to our success today. I would add that our new inward migrants have been essential to our own strong economic growth.

There are several other factors that have been extremely important in Ireland's development over the last 30 years. The first has been a commitment to providing social services for all, particularly in education and health. Without this we would not have the vibrant society and economy we have today. A second is our membership within the EU, and the importance of regional economic integration and support. I have heard it said many times that Ghana's exports and regional integration

with its West African neighbors will continue to be more important than markets in the EU or the US. A third has been the strong, moderate trade unions. Underpinning all of this is another factor which was crucial – a social compact or social contract between the government, the private sector, and citizens of all income levels to work together for an Ireland that is just, that does not tolerate abject poverty, and where public and private institutions feel they must be accountable to the people. For me this approach of shared responsibilities and high standards for justice is the cornerstone upon which an ever stronger Ghana can be built.

It was my previous positions and experience that led me to choose what the focus would be of my current organization, Realizing Rights. Our aim at Realizing Rights is to help put human rights standards at the heart of governance and policy-making. Our goals are to strengthen local and national capacities and voice in ways that will realize human rights, especially social and economic rights. We aim to increase national and international accountability for promoting human rights, and to support principled leaders in doing so.

People often challenge human rights proponents about importing impractical ideas, or about our idealism. But think about the opening line of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. In my travels around the globe for five years as UN High Commissioner, I never visited a spot where people didn't see the value of a stronger emphasis on human rights. Those in positions of power, whether public or private, may have balked, but not the citizens themselves.

Ghana faces now some critical questions about how to shape public policies, and I hope that within this the Government of Ghana and its development partners can acknowledge that a human rights framework, like the rule of law, will contribute to better development outcomes. I know there must be a lot of economists in this room, and sometimes it is the tendency of economists in particular to see rights primarily as 'costs'. But I would like to suggest some ways that we can translate such a framework into practical action.

Almost sixty years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirmed that a decent standard of living, including access to health and education, were fundamental human rights. Subsequent international agreements legally committed governments to the progressively realize those rights.

Let me talk briefly about health. I met your Minister of Health, Major Courage Quarshie, in Cape Town, and I hope to see him here later this week.

The Right to Health

In terms of policy-making for the health sector, I believe that we will not make full progress toward the objective of access to health for all unless we give greater attention to the links between health and realization of human rights.

The human rights framework forces a focused attention on vulnerable populations, for example poorer households and regions, minorities, and women especially. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, Paul Hunt, has noted that the right to health in practice means the right to an integrated and effective health system, responsive to local and national priorities and accessible to all.

The right to health zeroes in on the health aspects of the relationship between powerful actors, such as states and multinational corporations, and individual citizens. The right to health can be a powerful political and advocacy tool by means of which individuals and civil society groups can negotiate with governments to ensure basic health interests are protected, and can help health professionals understand their own obligations.

It is often said that high maternal mortality rates are the best indicator of a health system that is not equitable. I note that high maternal mortality rates are a pressing problem in Ghana despite robust growth and significant decreases in poverty.

At a recent meeting in Geneva I heard Francis Omaswa, formerly the Director General for Health Services in Uganda and now the Executive Director of the Global Health Workforce Alliance, speak poignantly about what the right to health meant to him. Prior to hosting a visit from Paul Hunt he wondered about how he could possibly provide the right to health in such a resource poor country as Uganda, and how his country would stack up in a country assessment on the right to health. He was initially skeptical. At the conclusion of the visit, after Paul spent several weeks touring the country, Francis understood the value of this approach. While Paul Hunt's report acknowledged the gaps that still exist in Uganda, it acknowledged the great advances Uganda has made in equalizing health services and implementing a decentralized health system founded on the principles of equity, non-discrimination, accountability, participation, and attention to the most vulnerable.

Ghana has a particular challenge because you produce so many well-qualified doctors, nurses and other personnel who then migrate abroad. My organization's separate work on health and on migration led us eventually to combine the two, because we realized that our support for humane migration policies and the freedom of movement of individuals had the perverse effect of leaving millions behind who could not then realize their right to health. I am glad that Ghana is a key country in our Health Worker Migration Policy Advisory Council, and in the OECD-DAC study of global health, and I feel with processes such as these we can really understand and address the links between health and migration.

The pillars of a human rights approach – such as equality and non-discrimination, accountability, transparency and access to information – are applicable across the range of development interventions.

Trade and Decent Work

This applies no less to productive sectors, and here my colleagues and I have been working to promote equitable trade and development policies that lead to decent work opportunities for all. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which marks its 60th anniversary in 2008, states that:

Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

Is this realistic for developing countries such as Ghana? We have been impressed by the work of the ILO whose Country Programs on Decent Work in Ghana and elsewhere use the human rights framework to guide their programs that include four key concepts:

- promoting increased access to decent work opportunities through better policies
- promoting rights, in particular the ILO's Core Labor Standards
- expanding social protection to all, and
- promoting social dialogue (in particular between governments, workers – including agricultural producers - and the private sector)

There are practical measures and challenges in achieving this. Most important is mainstreaming the notion that decent work is not only an aspirational goal, but a minimum social floor which States and others are obligated to progressively realize, and an enabling factor in development. Governments should be encouraged to simultaneously strive for both more jobs *and* better jobs. And we must match the search for expanded agricultural employment with the search for more productive and higher value-added agricultural employment, especially in developing countries, so that employment in agriculture does not become a dead end.

It was encouraging to see one of the documents for this meeting on agriculture, *Promoting Pro-Poor Growth*, which applies a strong rights based approach to support for agriculture. This can be through more, and more effective, public support for agriculture; differentiating the most vulnerable segments of those working in the agricultural sector; and being more responsive and accountable to people and their differing contexts. All of these are crucially important.

Equally, both governments and the private sector must re-examine their policies and practice in terms of whether they are creating decent work opportunities. Are trade reforms going to expand or shrink jobs in the agricultural and industrial sectors? As we stated in a Communiqué to the recent G8 meeting in Germany, we must ensure that trade policies and funds earmarked for Aid for Trade are spent in ways that create more and better jobs. A study we have just completed reviewing the potential impact on Ghana of EU Economic Partnership Agreements shows how important it is that trade negotiations take into account the employment implications of reforms, because trade liberalization will not automatically generate more and better jobs.*

I am looking forward to a field visit later this week to the ILO Decent Work Country Program to see firsthand the significant successes they have had in generating employment, upgrading informal businesses, achieving pro-poor growth in micro- and small enterprises, improved governance and even higher tax revenue. These were achieved by participatory planning and access to information and support, such as local business information centers. Part of this program's success came from a strong focus on favoring poor members of the community who are often excluded from development, like women and people with disabilities, and building on the right to organize and to dialogue within a participatory framework.

Throughout these years I have taken a particular interest in the role of the private sector, and I was pleased to be here last year for the UN Global Compact Global Learning Forum. Last July I joined the Board of the Global Compact, and we are working hard to strengthen the promotion of human rights by companies, and to have greater participation of small and medium enterprises. I also am proud to have helped set up, and chair, the Business Leaders Initiative on Human Rights, whose Secretariat is based in London. With the interest of Ghana and African countries in both stimulating more economic growth, and encouraging greater foreign investment, it is extremely important in my

* Economic Partnership Agreements between the EU and African Countries: Potential Development Implications for Ghana, Mayur Patel, June 2007, available at www.realizingrights.org

view that we pay attention fully, and early, to how business can play a role in promoting, rather than ignoring or even undermining, human rights. I know this is possible – where companies and governments apply themselves to making it happen, the results have been very positive. Expanding decent work opportunities in domestic and international supply chains, for example in cocoa and other agricultural products, should be a stated objective of investment.

Equally important, given Ghana's interest in attracting more foreign investment, and the rich resources it owns particularly in the mining sector, it is essential that the benefits of expanded mining activities are balanced with the risks to the livelihoods of communities who are being displaced, particularly given the competition for the same land, water resources and investment . My visits last year showed how challenging this is. I trust that the Government of Ghana will show good leadership domestically, and regionally as the ECOWAS Mining Code is developed, so that within the mining sector there is strong respect for human rights, greater transparency, and a greater share of resources going back into development locally and nationally.

Women's Rights

I want to end with a special note on the importance of promoting women's rights. We face challenges as we implement the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The Government of Ghana and its Development Partners are to be congratulated for being so far ahead in implementing the Paris Declaration. And in this, we have an historic opportunity to move cross-cutting concerns such as human rights and gender from the margins to the center of our approaches.

With the generally positive trend toward general budget support, and the Ghana Joint Assistance Strategy (GJAS), there has been an assumption that gender mainstreaming is both sufficient to ensure women's equality goals, and that gender mainstreaming at current levels is sufficient.

But recent studies have challenged this. The evidence does not show that gender mainstreaming in isolation contributes to the promotion of women's rights and gender equality. Moreover, the frameworks of the Beijing Platform of Action for Women, and CEDAW, were far stronger than what we have now in the MDGs, and those earlier frameworks should not be forgotten. Equally important, for groups that suffer discrimination and marginalization, civil society support is an essential complement to funding for governments, but bilateral and multilateral development assistance has decreased as a source of support for women's organizations in the past 10 years.

Even where gender equality goals are represented in legal and policy frameworks, they often 'evaporate' at the level of budgetary allocations, implementation and measuring impact. Gender equality indicators like literacy rates are important, but others cannot be overlooked: employment segregation, lack of reproductive rights, and gender-based violence all represent a violation of women's human rights.

Fortunately, at least 8 of the DAC members are in the process of updating or developing new gender equality policies and instruments, and we hope that these are incorporated more generally in the definition of aid effectiveness, as the role and value-added of women's rights organizations in development is reinforced.

In all of these areas I know that leadership and 'champions' at the government, donor and civil society level are essential. So I hope that these ideas sit well with how the Government of Ghana, and its Development Partners, envision the way forward for Ghana.

The successes of Ghana, and your strong capacity to address continuing challenges, have been an inspiration to me. I am sure they will be an inspiration to the African Union Summit delegates who will join you next week.

Thank you.