

WORLD LEADERS WARNED THAT THE RIGHT TO FOOD IS NOT NEGOTIABLE

(Dublin, 9th July 2008) Former President Mary Robinson is warning world leaders that they have an obligation to tackle the global food crisis now or they will be renegeing on commitments to respect the right to food for all.

Mrs Robinson, who is one of the world's leading advocates on human rights, made the call for action at a joint ActionAid Ireland/Concern Worldwide seminar in Dublin on Wednesday 9th July 2008 marking the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"The food crisis has many causes, most of them long-term and structural but exacerbated by factors beyond our control such as natural disasters. Food is a human right to which every woman, man and child is entitled. Everyone from political and business leaders to the world's hundreds of millions of small farmers must join together to solve this crisis. Investing more in agricultural production, reducing support for biofuel production that competes with food production, and improving our trade and food aid policies to stimulate and support local production are just some of the ways that we can address this problem now. Otherwise the Right to Food will remain out of the grasp of millions of people for years to come. The Elders Every Human Has Rights campaign, our partners like Action Aid, and civil society organizations including Concern and others around the world urge immediate action on all fronts" she said.

ActionAid Ireland and Concern Worldwide, both of whom are engaged in campaigns to eradicate hunger, say the problem will not be solved by quick-fix short-term solutions to provide more food aid.

Chris Kinyanjui, ActionAid Regional Director, East and Southern Africa said "The current food crisis is a man-made calamity that is affecting up to 100 million poor and hungry people right now and women are bearing the brunt of the burden. "

"Protection of the right to food has never been more urgent, yet unacceptably the recent Rome High Level Conference failed to win the financial commitments for vital aid to agriculture. The Irish government, and Mary Robinson have been leading lights in the struggle to end hunger, but we must work together to deepen our resolve and increase the investment in long term solutions like support for women farmers" he continued.

Tom Arnold, Chief Executive of Concern Worldwide, said "The current food crisis must be used as an opportunity to take political decisions and implement practical policies to indicate the right to food for all, both in the short and the long term."

"The world's richest countries, the G8, meet in Japan this week; they must demonstrate they understand the gravity of the food crisis through scaling up with aid. The oil exporting countries, whose income has been massively increased due to high oil prices, have a responsibility to increase their aid. Saudi Arabia recently contributed \$500 million to the World Food Programme: it is the time for other oil exporters to step up to the plate" continued Mr. Arnold.

"The governments of developing countries must change their long neglect of their agricultural sectors and put more resources into developing their own food production and their rural companies. Governments in the developed world, especially the US and the EU, need to re-assess their politics of promoting bio fuels through heavy subsidies which are resulting in further food price rises with all that implies for the poorest people in the world" concluded Mr. Arnold.

Both ActionAid and Concern Worldwide are also warning that failing to respect the right of the poor to food will also have a knock-on effect on other basic human rights, such as the right to education and the right to health and could be the start of a potentially serious deterioration in people's quality of life and a serious erosion of some of their most fundamental and basic human rights.

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Background:

Formerly President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson is now one of 'The Elders' – an influential group of high profile men and women, brought together by Nelson Mandela, to contribute their wisdom, independent leadership and integrity to tackling some of the world's toughest problems.

The Elders, with many organisations around the world, joined forces to launch the "Every Human Has Rights campaign" (<http://www.everyhumanhasrights.org>). 2008 is the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Each month a specific area of the rights contained in Universal Declaration is being highlighted.