

Betty Lacey introduced the two eco-justice processes that Mercy Global Action are working on at an Advocacy level - namely the Climate Change process and preparations for the Rio + 20 Conference to be held in Rio in 2012.

RIO + 20 CONFERENCE ORIGINS.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio in 1992 and was the forerunner to Rio +20. Known as the Earth Summit - the 1992 Conference set the agenda for subsequent conferences. Twenty years later, the UN still seeks to find ways to halt the destruction of irreplaceable natural resources and the pollution of the planet. The Summit's message in 1992 stated that nothing less than a transformation of our attitudes and behaviours would bring about the necessary changes. Today, this message is still reflected in the complexities of current problems; that poverty as well as excessive consumption by affluent populations place damaging stress on the environment. Governments must recognize the need to redirect international and national plans and policies to ensure that all economic decisions fully took into account any environmental impact.

THEMES

The object of the Conference is to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assess the progress to date, identify the remaining gaps in implementation of outcomes and address new and emerging challenges. United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) Rio+ will focus on two themes:

- Green Economy in the context of Sustainable Development and poverty eradication.
- Institutional Framework for sustainability development.

The Green Economy is described as “system of economic activities related to the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services that result in improved human well-being over the long term, while not exposing future generations to significant environmental risks and ecological scarcities”.

Sustainable development emphasizes a holistic, equitable and far-sighted approach to decision-making at all levels. It rests on integration and a balanced consideration of social, economic and environmental goals and objectives in both public and private decision-making. The concept of green economy focuses primarily on the intersection between environment and economy.

Rio + 20 identified three pillars of economic development: the economic, the social and the environment. The inter-relationship between them points to the need for a harmonious balance between social and environmental rights and sound economic principles. The need to strengthen the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD) was recognized as an overarching goal for institutions at the national, regional and international levels. The IFSD discussion thus also encompasses the role of institutions comprising the economic and social pillars, e.g. considering how to step up efforts to bridge the gap between the international financial institutions, the multilateral development banks and the rest of the UN system.

Sustainable living can be a term that is confusing, so I am using the following example of a community in the Philippines to illustrate how their livelihood and basic survival is threatened by large corporations. I met one of the representatives of a group from Bukidnon in the Philippines

who are fighting for their agrarian rights and attended a Human Rights Conference in Dublin last September. Global land grabbing has become a phenomenon in Bukidnon, Mindanao, Philippines. Land grabbing in massive proportions—committed by transnational agricultural giants, most of the time state-sanctioned, and facilitated by traditional landlords—is threatening not only the survival of small farmers and other land-based workers, but it also puts into serious risk every strand of human rights and fundamental freedoms of the populace in this mainly-agrarian province. As land reform programs are being subverted nationally, Bukidnon has become a locus of bloody agrarian unrests in the country, and the culture of impunity which exists in relation to human rights violations in agrarian situations have swelled drastically. Far from the 'eyes' of the national and international media and pro-reform support groups, the struggle of the peasants for genuine land development have become most vulnerable to international corporate plantations and landlord resistance.

'Global land grabbing', as defined by the Pesticide Action Network–Asia and the Pacific, refers to land deals, whether as direct purchases or long-term leases are being brokered in poor countries, and in this case, the poor province of Bukidnon, by advanced countries and their TNCs as they command resources to produce crops either for food, feedstock or agrofuel in commercial and export quantities. They have been called land grabs, not as reference to their illegality since many of the deals have passed government approvals, but as description of the unjust terms through which they have been transacted and the utter lack of consultation with the communities of farmers and indigenous peoples—often times done with the use of might. In Bukidnon, TNCs conspired with the traditional landlords in grabbing vast tracks of land, and in evading agrarian reform programs.

DURBAN CONFERENCE – CLIMATE CHANGE

ORIGINS.

For over the past 200 years, the burning of fossil fuels, such as coal and oil, and deforestation have caused the concentrations of heat-trapping greenhouse gases to increase significantly in our atmosphere. These gases prevent heat from escaping to space, somewhat like the glass panels of a greenhouse. Greenhouse gases are necessary to life as we know it, because they keep the planet's surface warmer than it otherwise would be. But, as the concentrations of these gases continue to increase in the atmosphere, the Earth's temperature is climbing above past levels. The Earth's average surface temperature has increased by about 1.2 to 1.4°F in the last 100 years. The eight warmest years on record (since 1850) have all occurred since 1998, with the warmest year being 2005. Most of the warming in recent decades is very likely the result of human activities. Other aspects of the climate are also changing such as rainfall patterns, snow and ice cover, and sea level. If greenhouse gases continue to increase, climate models predict that the average temperature at the Earth's surface could increase from 3.2 to 7.2°F above 1990 levels by the end of this century.

Climate change is a huge risk to future global prosperity and threatens to inflict significant major social, economic and environmental costs. Climate change affects people, plants, and animals. Scientists are working to better understand future climate change and how the effects will vary by region and over time. Scientists have observed that some changes are already occurring. Observed effects include sea level rise, shrinking glaciers, changes in the range and distribution of plants and animals, trees blooming earlier, lengthening of growing seasons, ice on rivers and lakes freezing later

and breaking up earlier, and thawing of permafrost.

Another key issue being studied is how societies and the Earth's environment will adapt to or cope with climate change. Almost two decades ago, countries joined an international treaty, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to cooperatively consider what they could do to limit average global temperature increases and the resulting climate change, and to cope with whatever impacts were, by then, inevitable. This was in 1992.

The UN Climate Change Conference was held in Durban from November 28 to December 9th of this year. The Durban conference agenda consisted of four main issues.

1. The adoption and ratification of a just and legally binding agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol which runs out at the end of 2012. This agreement sets out the legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their green house gas emissions. Resolution of the political question on the second commitment of the Kyoto Protocol is now needed. A clear decision has to be made on how the global collective effort, not only of industrialized countries, will go forward and reduce emissions for future years.
2. Following on from the previous Conference in Cancun Mexico, participating countries decided that they would engage in a review starting in 2013, on the efforts of countries to reduce their annual emissions in compliance with the Protocol's commitments. The second issue in the Durban Conference is to define the rules for this review.
3. The third issue is clarity on climate finance - firstly the approval of the Green Climate Fund and secondly, the need to increase the fund to \$100 billion by 2020, which was decided under the same Cancun Agreement. Many countries are vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change in large part because they lack the domestic resources to support projects and innovations that would, for example, help stave off agricultural disasters or ease the transition to a clean energy economy. Financial, technical, and other support to countries whose economies are developing is critical. The magnitude of need requires close cooperation between developing and developed countries.
4. The fourth issue for discussion is to define and measure adaptation and mitigation measures. Mitigation refers to human intervention to reduce emissions and halt climate change, while adaptation refers to the measures needed to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change. Urgently needed mitigation and adaptation measures are very expensive, and the developing world must be supported by the rich, in keeping keeping promises on financial support to help them develop while also polluting less.

To finish I would like to focus on Ireland and the challenges it faces in the current economic difficulties in respect of adhering to our commitments in the area of climate change, especially as a result of the recent December 2011 budget.

IRELAND - THE GREEN PARTY REACTION TO BUDGET 2012

In their nine months in Government, Fine Gael and Labour have shown that whatever they stand for, it is not sustainability.

They have abandoned all the major public transport projects: Metro North, Dublin's rail interconnector, the western rail corridor. They have sidelined climate change legislation and clear emissions targets for different sectors. They have weakened incentives for low emissions vehicles. They have excluded solid fuels from the carbon levy, reducing it to a revenue-raising tax, rather than an incentive to low-emissions living. They have scaled back support measures for retro-fitting energy efficiency in our buildings.

Representing labour and capital, they seem locked in a battle over the division of economic spoils. They ignore the fact that our activities are causing our planet to burn.

On the Opposition benches, the clientelist and nationalist culture in Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin will make it difficult for them to adapt to Green thinking which is instinctively more liberal and international in its nature. A radical international vision is vital as Europe edges towards the kind of integration which, with the right leadership, could allow it to steer the world towards sustainability. We don't just need to live within our fiscal means; we need to live within the means of the planet.

There are some politicians from other parties who "get" elements of Green thinking. But only the Green Party bases all its policies on the simple fact that the resources of the planet are not infinite. For us in the West, it means economic security: energy security and sustainable jobs which won't disappear overnight.

But it also means having a wider definition of a useful member of society. If you raise a child, run the GAA club, or simply stop to chat with your elderly neighbour, you are making a vital, measurable contribution.

For the developing world, it means a climate which doesn't destroy life before it has even begun. It means having a chance of getting your kids to adulthood and through education. It means ending the shame of global inequality.

At the weekend the Green Party returned to the Central Hotel in Dublin to celebrate its 30th birthday and to start all over again. We can still recall how to run a campaigning organisation on a purely voluntary basis, with scarce resources.

Lessons have been learned from the mistakes which were made in government. It was not easy being Green in recent years but we can now put those lessons to good use in presenting an honest analysis of the changes we need to make in our political system. People struggled to come to terms with the implications of a severe recession and understandably considered any focus on wider issues as an insult. But the wider issues of climate change and energy security are fundamental to any economic recovery