

Mary Robinson Urged Striding Toward Climate Justice

By: Stacy Erickson, Alexandra Cousteau Environment and Global Climate Change Fellow

Former President of Ireland Mary Robinson visited UCF on Feb. 8, and spoke to a crowd of over 300 people. The event was organized by the UCF Global Perspectives Office and was a feature of UCF's Presidential Distinguished Visitors Series. Robinson, also a former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, delivered a presentation titled, "Climate Justice: The Nexus of International Leadership, Climate Change, Food, Water and Poverty."



Photo courtesy of UCF Marketing

Robinson explained, "The effects of climate change are felt first, hardest and disproportionately by the communities that do the least to create the problem." Robinson recounted her visits to Ethiopia, Honduras, Vietnam and Swaziland, explaining the devastation communities faced due to drought. Robinson also referenced people from an island of Papua New Guinea being forced off their ancestor's island due to climate change. She compared the effects of climate change to the Titanic, warning that the lower class were not the only ones to sink.

Robinson continued by saying, "The current way of life is flawed and unstable," noting that most clean living plans that countries have put forward, even when fully implemented -which most are not- are insufficient. Robinson argued that developed nations turning away from fossil fuels is only so helpful when developing countries still see using fossil fuels as the way out of poverty.

Robinson stressed the importance of the world acting in solidarity, motivated by self-interest, when producing climate change legislature. She applauded the efforts of the UN and its recent efforts to curb climate change, especially in 2015. However, she pushed for greater rules of

transparency between countries on their actions to meeting cleaner living legislation. Additionally, she called for greater enforcement of transparency laws, which would force states to enforce plans based on accountability.

Robinson concluded her speech with a call to action of the students in the audience. She acknowledged UCF's sustainability work and told the students, "The Green Revolution is driven by young minds who can grapple with the efforts needed to be taken while keeping fairness in mind." Robinson assured students of all academic disciplines that there is potential for them to help fight climate change. She explained we need good people with the means to do good to ignite a radical and just change.

When asked what people can do in their everyday lives to try and reduce their impact on climate change, Robinson stressed her goal of a "1.5° Celsius lifestyle." This referenced the scientific prediction of devastation if the world's temperature rises by more than 2°. Robinson suggested being more mindful of waste production, using less energy, using less water, eating less meat and reusing rather than buying new.

In addition to UCF's Global Perspectives Office, sponsors of this presentation include the Lester N. Mandell Endowed Distinguished Lecture Series, UCF Office of Diversity and Inclusion, UCF Human Trafficking Awareness Program, and UCF College of Sciences.



After the event, Robinson greeted members of the audience. Photo courtesy of UCF Marketing.