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Jacob Sandstrom

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Mary Robinson, 2009 Inamori Ethics Prize Recipient Jacob Sandstrom

In September 2009, Mary Robinson became the second recipient of the Inamori Ethics Prize at Case Western Reserve University, one month after being awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by former U.S. President Barack Obama.¹ The first female president of Ireland from 1990 to 1997, Robinson is a stalwart supporter of freedom, a crusader for human rights, and a pioneer in advocating for conscientious action on climate change. In addition to her tenure as president of Ireland, Robinson served as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1997 to 2002, is the founder of the Mary Robinson Foundation—Climate Justice, and is an active member of The Elders, among many other notable achievements and accolades.

Since receiving the Inamori Ethics Prize, Mary Robinson has remained active in world affairs, speaking at multiple summits and working to resolve conflicts worldwide by advocating for peace, justice, and sustainability. Reflecting on her time as High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2013, Robinson noted that it is “important to have the stamina to work on something until it comes right.”² Though no longer the High Commissioner, Robinson has been involved with the United Nations and has used her stamina to spark key dialogues on issues of conflict resolution and climate. A well-respected world leader, Mary Robinson continues to use her prominence as a force for positive change.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed Mary Robinson as the one-year Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region of Africa to support “implementation of the Peace Security and Cooperation for the Democratic Republic of the Congo” in 2013.³ In this role, Robinson called for increased support for implementing “all commitments at the national and regional levels” to ensure “concrete peace dividends and lasting life improvements to the people in the region.”⁴ While the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains rife with conflict, Mary Robinson’s efforts made a marked difference.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon again called on Robinson to serve as his Special Envoy in 2014, this time to address climate change. As the Special Envoy for Climate Change, Robinson was charged with “engag[ing] Heads of State and Governments around the world in order to mobilize political will and action, and to raise ambition in advance of the 2014 Climate Sum-

mit.”⁵ Her exceptional work landed her yet another appointment to serve as a Special Envoy on El Niño and Climate in 2016, where she worked to address the threat of extreme weather in impoverished countries, particularly in East Africa, Southern Africa, Central America, and the Pacific.⁶

Beyond her official capacities at the United Nations, Robinson has worked closely with former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, Nelson Mandela, and other Elders, notably on de-escalation of the Korean Peninsula, Middle East peace, and climate change by engaging with aspirant young leaders and global citizens.⁷ Her participation in important dialogues with former, current, and future leaders has led to the incorporation of human rights commitments in important global decisions, including the Paris Agreement.⁸ She has also been vocal on issues of child marriage and the current refugee crisis.⁹

Mary Robinson’s commitment to advocacy is driven by a desire to help people in the greatest need of support. In creating and maintaining the Mary Robinson Foundation–Climate Justice, Robinson has created a “platform for solidarity, partnership and shared engagement for all who care about global justice” that seeks to foster a “people-centered, developmental approach” to climate justice.¹⁰ As the organization moves toward its 2020 goals, Robinson continues to forge her legacy as an effective, impressive, dedicated leader in many facets.

Robinson’s vision and resolve continue to make a difference in global affairs, and despite setbacks, her outlook is positive. In 2017, Robinson expressed to *The Irish Times* that “she has become more optimistic about the global response to climate change” and encourages a “Marshall Plan” on climate based on increased knowledge and understanding.¹¹ Moving forward, Robinson intends to continue “to work for climate justice for so long as [she has] health and energy.”¹²

Notes

1. “Presidential Medal of Freedom.” CBS News. August 12, 2009. Accessed April 19, 2018. <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/presidential-medal-of-freedom/10/>.
2. Alison Beard, “Interview with Mary Robinson.” *Harvard Business Review*. March 2013. Accessed April 19, 2018. <https://hbr.org/2013/03/mary-robinson>.
3. “Secretary-General Appoints Mary Robinson of Ireland Special Envoy for Great Lakes Region of Africa.” United Nations. March 18, 2013. Accessed April 19, 2018. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2013/sga1394.doc.htm>.
4. “DR Congo Peace Efforts, Regional Framework at Crucial Juncture, UN Officials Stress.” United Nations News. January 13, 2014. Accessed April 19, 2018. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/01/459592-dr-congo-peace-efforts-regional-framework-crucial-juncture-un-officials-stress>.

5. "Secretary-General Appoints Mary Robinson of Ireland Special Envoy for Climate Change." United Nations. July 14, 2014. Accessed April 19, 2018. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sga1481.doc.htm>.
6. "Secretary-General Appoints Mary Robinson of Ireland, Macharia Kamau of Kenya Special Envoys on El Niño and Climate." United Nations. May 20, 2016. Accessed April 19, 2018. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sga1660.doc.htm>.
7. "Profile: Mary Robinson." The Elders. Accessed April 19, 2018. <https://www.theelders.org/mary-robinson>.
8. "Profile: Mary Robinson."
9. "Profile: Mary Robinson."
10. "Mission and Vision." Mary Robinson Foundation—Climate Justice. Accessed April 19, 2018. <https://www.mrfcj.org/about/mission-and-vision/>.
11. Kevin O'Sullivan, "'Marshall Plan' Needed for Climate Change, Says Mary Robinson." *Irish Times*. November 14, 2017. Accessed April 19, 2018. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/marshall-plan-needed-for-climate-change-says-mary-robinson-1.3291484>.
12. Sheila Langan, "What Are You Like?: Mary Robinson." *Irish America Magazine*. June 2016. Accessed April 19, 2018. <http://irishamerica.com/2016/06/what-are-you-like-mary-robinson-2/>.