

Mary Robinson remarks

I first want to thank all of you who are here today. My team at Realizing Rights and the ILO team have worked very hard to pull this event together, and we know you all have many events to choose from. In fact, we have designed today's event knowing that people will be moving in and out during the day. But you have been invited because we believe that all of you in this room have important roles to play in taking forward the Decent Work agenda:

- the right economic policies to create not just more jobs, but better jobs
- respect for human rights
- social protection
- and social dialogue

I saw this in action last year when I visited Ghana and saw the ILO Decent Work program help informal businesses get formalized, and help groups of women palm oil producers organize themselves to get better prices, and help micro-businesses – owners and workers – register in the national health insurance program.

I saw this in action two weeks ago in Liberia where workers employed on road building projects were given fair wages and safe working conditions, and again supported to organize into groups for a stronger voice. I learned of the successes of the Liberian Ministry of Labor in gaining agreement from Firestone to give better pay and working conditions to their workers.

Juan Somavia and the ILO have been both visionary and tireless in bringing forward this framework for bringing about a better future. But like any program of action, more efforts are required by far more actors.

This is a month with several events dedicated to Decent Work, and my organization's participation is contributing particularly to this theme within The Elders Every Human Has Rights campaign. Some of you were at the Decent Work event in Norway on September 5th organized by the Government of Norway and the Financial Times, in which Juan and I were joined by Pascal Lamy of the WTO and many other speakers. Some of you were at the Decent Work event in Liberia just two weeks ago organized by the Government of Liberia, the ILO and Realizing Rights. We benefited enormously there from hearing speakers from across Africa – from all sectors of society. From Oslo to Monrovia to New York – we are traveling this road to build momentum for Decent Work.

This is a difficult week to hold an event because there is so much going on. But the Decent Work agenda must be better understood and taken forward by member states of the UN and UN agencies, and strengthened within the MDG framework, so this is an important time and place for our gathering.

The Decent Work agenda must be understood and taken forward by the private sector as well. We will never make sufficient progress unless we recognize existing business leadership and cultivate future leaders in business. We know it isn't easy – the marketplace is competitive and can be ruthless, especially to its most vulnerable workers. But if we don't listen to *their* perspectives and make the decent work agenda real to them – whether

they are factory workers, road builders, waste collectors or farmers – we condemn ourselves to a world that is increasingly unequal and, indeed, unstable.

The Decent Work agenda must also be understood and taken forward by civil society. Not just by labor rights organizations, but by other human rights organizations, major development NGOs, campaigning networks, think tanks, and foundations.

Our Forum today has brought all of you together to explore the concept and practice of Decent Work in order to join together with the ILO, Realizing Rights, the Elders Every Human Has Rights campaign, and countries leading on the issue like Liberia and Norway, to catalyze greater commitment in the months and years ahead. We hope that our messages will be heard in the High Level Event on the MDGs on Thursday, and in the African Development meeting taking place across the street at the UN Secretariat today.

In less than three months we will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 23 affirms the right to work, to just and favorable conditions of work, to protection against unemployment, to just and favorable remuneration, to form and join trade unions. These bring women and men an existence worthy of human dignity. These will help ensure social justice and a fair globalization for all.

I recall what the Liberians asked us. There and in other countries, they want more support to expand decent work programs. They want us to work with

them to find better ways to help women and men working in the informal economy as waste collectors or market women. And they want us to ensure our companies are giving a fair deal to the Liberians whose hard work makes their investments profitable.

Remember Article 29 of the Declaration: Everyone has duties to the community. Today and going forward, we hope that each of you will help us to support such working people everywhere.

Thank you.