



International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

Statement from President Michael D. Higgins

Saturday, 17 October, 2020



Today, as we mark the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, we have an opportunity to reflect on how we might redress one of the great failures of our multilateral world – the scandal of extreme poverty including the scourge of hunger of so many of our fellow global citizens.

According to the latest ‘Global Hunger Index’, levels of hunger in 11 countries have been described as ‘alarming’, with another 40 countries at a ‘serious’ level of hunger.

Most of the acute levels of hunger are concentrated in Africa, where countries are also faced with the devastating consequences of climate change. Then too, existing and inherently unequal food systems have contributed much to exacerbating these inequalities.

Giving support to the UN Sustainable Development Goal of ‘zero hunger’ by 2030, already well behind target, is now more urgent than ever, as we face the added threat of COVID-19.

This new challenge of the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the enormous extent to which our lives on this shared planet are inter-twined with one another, and how the most vulnerable are most at risk.

There is no doubt that the spread of the Covid-19 virus has had a profound impact on all our lives, and many have lost loved ones, lost their livelihoods, or have seen their lives altered in dramatic ways. All of us have had to come to rely on the solidarity of others, in a renewed awareness that no-one will be safe from the virus until every one of us is.

And just as the virus has so forcefully underlined our mutual dependence, it has also served as a powerful reminder that crises do not affect everyone in the same way.

Food and nutrition insecurity, already exacerbated by the effects of climate change, have resulted in 5.3 million children dying before their fifth birthday in 2018 alone.

As is the case with so many crises, including climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted on those most vulnerable, and those most marginalised. For those who have been displaced or persecuted, who are the victims of natural disasters, who live in daily poverty in cramped and overcrowded conditions, deprived of clean water or an adequate health system, the threat of Covid-19 brings increased fears and poorer outcomes.

If we are to not only halt the spread of the virus, but prevent the economic collapse of the developing world and the spread of food insecurity to over a billion of our fellow global citizens, our response to the Coronavirus pandemic must be one of global co-operation – a response in which the phrase ‘we are all in this together’ is a truly generous one, encompassing all our vulnerable and marginalised global citizens.

Today, on the UN International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, let us join in solidarity, and in unprecedented circumstances, with those across the world who are impoverished, powerless and excluded.

And let us undertake to re-double our efforts, in a spirit of shared humanity, to build a society that is not only aware of existing vulnerabilities, but that actively and deliberately works to shield the vulnerable and empower those most in need.

For in doing so, we will not only be building a better life for those most at risk, but for all of us.

Thank you. Beir beannacht

