



green
party

Green Party co-chair Kelly Andrews address to the Green Party AGM Belfast, 2008 entitled: Greens- Leaders in Europe

I am happy to be here today as Co-Chair of the Green Party in Northern Ireland, and as a participant in a growing global movement. Green politics as a political force has been gradually building momentum; the challenge of climate change is so great, so demanding that action is now the only remedy. The time of procrastination and pondering is long gone.

The planet is likely to experience "irreversible" impacts if the increase in global temperature is not brought under control. For example, if temperature rises above about 3.5 degrees C, between 40 per cent and 70 per cent of the species assessed might be at increased risk of extinction, says the fourth and final report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change before the Climate Convention meeting in Bali in December.

The IPCC Report makes a strong link between climate change and the wider challenges facing particular developing countries a result of issues like poverty, unequal access to resources, conflict and disease. We need collaboration between nation states if real change is to be achieved, nowhere is cooperation between governments more evident than in the European Union.

Throughout Europe Greens have been growing in strength and influence, the European Greens are now the fourth largest block in the European Parliament. The Greens are in Government in the Czech Republic, Finland, until very recently Italy, Latvia and of course we are in Government in the Republic of Ireland. In Ireland this has resulted in its 2008 budget being the greenest ever, with the introduction of a carbon budget which sets out the Government's plans and targets for reducing carbon emissions in the coming year and integrates climate change considerations into the Government's budgetary policy and decision making processes. This proves elected Greens make a real difference.

In Europe the greens have a political vision for Europe's future, which is based on the politics of sustainable development, which requires a holistic and joined up approach to policy development. Some accuse the greens of being anti-development; I would say we are for development that redefines its economic goals so that protection of the environment and the common good of people are given priority over private interests. It's time to get real.

The European Greens want eco-development, the economy must adapt to what the natural environment can tolerate. This is the reality of the time we live in. Total global use of natural resources is estimated to be about 20% above what the planet can produce. The average EU citizen uses more than twice the global average. The aims of the Green economy are ecological sustainability, equity and social justice as well as self-reliance of local and regional economies, encouraging a true sense of community. Eco-development has to be based on democracy, transparency, gender equality and the right of all people to express themselves and participate fully in decision-making.

The Greens advocate a comprehensive concept of global security, which cannot be defined solely in military terms. Therefore, Green policies concentrate on the prevention of armed conflicts, on removing the causes of war and on developing ways to peaceful conflict resolution. Efforts to combat racism, for mutual understanding and respect for other cultures and, above all else, to end global poverty, would be Europe's strongest and most effective security plan.

Nuclear disarmament and a comprehensive Test Ban Treaty are urgent priorities. The Greens want all exports of European military and nuclear technology controlled, reduced and eventually eliminated. The government had announced plans to spend 78 Billion pounds on replacing the Trident weapons systems and keeping it going for 30 years. This is completely obscene. We have no moral authority to dictate to other countries such as Iran, that they should not have nuclear technology, when we continue to invest in nuclear weapons. The nuclear non-proliferation treaty is often used by the Government and America as a stick to beat Iran with regarding their nuclear aspirations. The nuclear non-proliferation treaty has two parts, one that countries who not have nuclear weapons will not develop them, and two, which the Government seems to forget, that countries that do have nuclear weapons will systematically get rid of them. It is also irreverent, when you consider the real security issue, the real crisis we face. If a fraction of that money was spent on renewable energy and guaranteeing our fuel security surely it would be a more sensible lead to the rest of the world.

The labour government recently announced plans to invest more capital in nuclear power, the government claim that their decision to back a new generation of nuclear facilities is part of their strategy to combat climate change and that nuclear energy is safe and affordable. The reality is that nuclear energy is neither safe, clean, carbon free or cost effective. Gordon Brown's government argues that new nuclear power plants are a necessary part of the UK's strategy to combat climate change. This is far from being the case as even if the UK built ten new reactors, nuclear power can only deliver a 4 per cent cut in carbon emissions some time after 2025 which is far too late and at far too high a price, both in financial and environmental terms. One of the biggest problems with nuclear energy is that there is no safe way of disposing nuclear waste. That is why building new nuclear plants is extremely irresponsible as it will cause extremely serious health and environmental problems for future generations.

Greens want to see a nuclear free Europe as part of their vision for sustainable society, a strategy for reducing our dependency on fossil fuels, particularly the oil dependency. Greens in Europe are pursuing an innovation path that combines energy efficiency, energy saving and the development of renewable energies. The Greens advocate a new citizenship, where human rights and rights of minorities, the civil rights of immigrants and the individual's right to asylum are fundamental. Basic human rights include the right to healthy and clean environment; to free education, social protection and paid work; to full participation regardless of gender, race, creed, birthplace, parentage, disability or sexuality. There should be greater democratic control and openness in institutions of power. The UN should be given extended possibilities to strengthen peace and development, and be more efficient in peace keeping activities.

The Greens in Europe have been the major drivers regarding the campaign to keep the European Union GM free. Thanks to the Greens the adoption of the existing European legislations regarding the authorization, traceability and labeling of GMO and GM products is now in place. However, at present the European Commission a non elected body is currently considering the authorization of two different varieties of GM maize, the Commission is in the process of preparing its decisions for submission to members' states government in the European council. It is important we maintain our strong position against GMO.

Dr Caroline Lucas, Green MEP for South-East England, endorsed the firm stance of all greens when she said, "There is every reason why we need to keep up the fight to keep Europe GM-free, the tragedy is that it is such a relentless fight, despite not only the rapidly accumulating evidence in our favour and the enormous relevance of the precautionary principle, but also the overwhelming public opposition to GMOs." Public opinion polls consistently show that 70 percent or more of consumers in Europe do not want to eat GM food.

In Europe the Greens will continue to strive for greater measures to address Climate change, improve food standards and farming practices, improve animal welfare, keep Europe GM free, fight nuclear power in all its forms, build a society based on social justice for all. Being green is not about being backwards-looking; it is about looking forward to a future which uses cleaner, safer and more efficient energy. We need progress which is environmentally, socially and politically sustainable. In fact the policies we need for an improved quality of life are precisely the policies we need to tackle climate change.

I am so proud to be part of a political party which has the radical vision and pragmatic policies to deliver social and environmental change. Martin Luther King had a dream, not a nightmare - we have to get better at inspiring people with our vision of green, safe, future. We can start here and now. So thank you for being here - it really does make a difference.

Kelly Andrews