It is always a pleasure to return to Stanford. I would like to thank the Stanford Humanities Center for inviting me to take part in this lecture series.

Being able to visit and spend time in great universities around the world like Stanford has been one of the true privileges of my life. But I must confess to often coming away from such visits feeling I've received much more than I have given. Being able to interact with, and be challenged by, committed and insightful students and faculty is rewarding. Having the time to examine and develop new approaches to addressing complex challenges away from the rush of daily pressures has been invaluable for me over the years. So I have been very much looking forward to being here again at Stanford with all of you.

It seems a fitting time to return. When I visited Stanford in early 2003 to deliver the Tanner Lectures, it was shortly after completing my five year term as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. I was just starting the work then of setting out my thinking on how I could continue to contribute to issues I felt strongly about. I only knew a few things for sure at the time about what I should do next.

I was still very much committed to promoting greater respect for human rights around the world. I was excited about the chance of doing so from the vantage point of civil society - after many years in public office – first as an elected representative in my native Ireland, and later as an international official at the United Nations. I felt I could perhaps use my experience to serve as a bridge between local, national and global leadership and bring partners together, working across institutional and geographic divides, to tackle real problems and ensure that the voices of those who too are often marginalized in policy debates were heard. And I was committed to working with others to demonstrate that by
keeping a focus on human rights principles, we could make a difference in addressing intractable global challenges and catalyze others to do the same.

Those ideas took shape in the form of Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative. I'm extremely proud of what our small team at Realizing Rights has achieved in the intervening years. We have adopted a flexible, nimble, entrepreneurial approach to partnering, leveraging, and creating synergies to advance human rights strategies. Our work is mainly funded by foundations, and a few governments with whom we work closely on some of those strategies. Part of our skill is to link groups addressing issues at local level in African countries with those with power and influence – donor governments, UN agencies, the private sector and development agencies such as Oxfam, of which I serve as Honorary President.

We've worked with our partners to show what it takes – in practical terms - to realize the human right to health, focusing on the most vulnerable, but also working with governments to strengthen health systems in Ethiopia, Mali, Senegal and Sierra Leone. We've collaborated with organizations committed to expanding opportunities for decent work for all in Ghana and Liberia. We've engaged with powerful women at all levels to support and value women's leadership in promoting peace and security in some of the world’s most tragic conflicts such as Darfur. We've helped shape an emerging movement around the corporate responsibility to respect human rights. And we've highlighted the urgent relevance of human rights commitments in addressing the mounting threat of climate change which is already impacting negatively on millions of people least able to cope.

Realizing Rights was always conceived as a fixed-term initiative, and this has helped us focus on the quality of our partnerships. At the end of this year, we will reach our planned end, but we don’t see it as the end of our efforts. Far from it – we’ve worked to create many new beginnings. That means developing new programs that will carry forward specific aspects of the work we’ve developed, such as the Institute for Human Rights and Business operating out of London. It means working hard to empower others
to take the lessons of our shared efforts into new contexts. We’re preparing to step back, knowing that many more will be stepping forward.

I’ll reflect more on this later. I would like to use my remarks today essentially to share with you my thoughts about how the work to ensure respect for human rights has evolved and has also encountered significant obstacles in recent years. I would like to put forward a number of ideas for taking forward the ongoing work to protect human rights as we enter the second decade of the 21st century. I base my remarks on reflections from my career in law, politics, the UN, and importantly the work of Realizing Rights. These experiences inform my – admittedly very ambitious – vision for the future.

We entered the twenty first century with over 50 years experience of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which had offered a vision of a shared humanity and of shared responsibilities to each other, irrespective of place, color, religion, sex, or occupation. These values were strongly reiterated in the UN Millennium Declaration adopted in September 2000, which I urge you all to read.

The essence of human rights is that they are universal: they apply to everyone, wherever they live. Yet we know that there is still a need to translate the message of the Universal Declaration and make it a more integral part of different cultural, political and social contexts.

It is important to acknowledge that despite the fact that the Universal Declaration has been affirmed and reaffirmed by every government in the decades since its adoption, there continue to be questions about what exactly is meant by the term ‘human rights’. For some, they remain confined to a narrow understanding of civil and political liberties, excluding the broad international framework embracing economic, social and cultural rights, which the Universal Declaration proclaimed. For others, they are seen as threats to long held cultural traditions and viewed as being imposed by outside forces. But we should recall that the Universal Declaration is in fact a careful balance of individual freedoms, social protection, economic opportunity and duties to community. It’s also
critical that we remember that the Declaration, and the international human rights system that flowed from it, was never meant to impose a single model of right conduct on governments and societies. Rather, its “common standard of achievement” must continually be brought to life in a variety of ways in different countries.

It is true that as we look back on the past six decades, implementation of human rights obligations has fallen far short of commitments made. Tragically, the implementation gaps have arguably grown even wider in recent years. This has been due in part to the emergence of a more security-driven global political environment since the attacks against the United States in September 2001, which has had serious negative impacts on human rights around the world. Equally troubling, old Cold War divisions have given way to new forms of polarization between North and South on key areas of policy, including trade, aid, and the environment, in ways that are unhelpful to effective national action and international cooperation on human rights issues.

But there are hopeful signs as well. Civil and political rights have gained more acceptance in former Eastern Bloc countries, and while they are still not universally respected, the global community has coalesced around the importance of freedom of expression and assembly, expectations of equality and non-discrimination, and representative and participative democracy. Equally important, the notion that economic, social and cultural rights should be enjoyed by all has also gained ground. Illiteracy, lack of access to water or basic health services, education or shelter are now increasingly seen as human rights violations toward which governments hold obligations.

The challenge for this century is to ensure there is both political will and public concern for the values of human rights. We must build upon successes. Let me take as one example of success, a regional human rights framework I know well. The European Convention on Human Rights, adopted in 1950, is now part of the law in all member states of the Council of Europe. The Convention and the European Court of Human Rights have played a key role in increasing human rights awareness and accountability.
across Europe. The decisions of the Court on individual cases have resulted in a substantive jurisprudence steadily built up over more than five decades.

The European Court, in turn, increasingly takes into account the concluding observations and recommendations of the UN treaty monitoring bodies as well as the decisions of the International Court of Justice. The European Convention has also had a positive effect on the Inter-American human rights system - the emphasis on a judicial approach, on the right of individual petition, and on binding judgments. And many developing countries have steadily strengthened their attention to building strong human rights institutions. In South Africa the post-Apartheid Constitution was built on international human rights law, and has served as a guide for everything from the government’s social protection initiatives to the legal basis for successful HIV/AIDS activism in challenging global trade rules and practices of the global pharmaceutical industry. Human Rights Commissions across the world are forming a strong network and solidifying their influence. For example, representatives of the 80 or so national Human Rights Commissions will meet in Edinburgh in October to share experiences in business and human rights, and how to strengthen corporate responsibility at local level.

Though important work is being done to strengthen governance in many countries, far too little emphasis is placed on ensuring access to a well-functioning human rights protection system. This is a core subject of another innovative strategy initiated by the Swiss government and involving Realizing Rights. Noting that there had been no inter-governmental follow up to the 50th Anniversary of the UDHR in 1998, the Swiss government decided during 2008 to ensure that there would be some carry forward from the 60th anniversary. An independent eminent group was established, which I co-chair with Paulo Sergio Pinheiro of Brazil, and our report submitted at the end of 2008 was entitled

_Protecting Dignity: an Agenda for Human Rights_. It contains a number of proposals, of which a key one is the need to establish a Fund to support national human rights protection systems. We drew on the experience of the vast sums that have been invested to combat inequities in global health, notably by private philanthropy and multi-
stakeholder alliances of governments, private sector and civil society actors. Millions of people have benefited from these efforts. The focus increasingly has been on strengthening the health system itself.

The report of the eminent group urges that the time has come to mount similar efforts aimed at fostering effective and accountable human rights protection systems – with a particular focus on justice systems. Clearly this won’t be an easy project to get off the ground given the ongoing global economic crisis and the complexity and political sensitivities involved. Many actors are involved already doing important work in this space and it will be important to think carefully about roles and comparative advantages of a range of organizations and how countries can best be supported.

There are many institutions and organisations capable of promoting and protecting human rights in any given country that are in need of support. For example, Alternative Law Groups and associations of paralegals (helping people bring claims to service providers and government agencies), public interest lawyers and advocacy associations (which have been instrumental in life-saving socio-economic rights litigation in India, South Africa and elsewhere), public audit bodies (monitoring public expenditure at national and local levels in connection with social programmes), not to mention professional associations, religious bodies and the media can all be powerful advocates for human rights.

We must ensure that international aid in the justice sector is genuinely consistent with national needs, and ‘owned’ in a real sense by national stakeholders themselves. And we’ll also have to give consideration to the possible relevance of business and private sector contributions to national level capacity building in the human rights field, given the proportionately increasing influence of private versus official aid flows. But we must also bear in mind the distinctive and potentially complex policy implications attending public/private partnerships in the human rights field.

Finally, we’ll have to be mindful of the evolving aid effectiveness discourse – designed to improve coherence, efficiency, national ownership and mutual accountability in aid
relationships - but which has yet to make significant inroads into the domain of human rights technical assistance. We will face a challenging set of international aid policy questions - aid accountability questions versus national ownership, and challenges concerning the privatisation of aid, policy incoherence and the uncoordinated proliferation of global funds (notably in the health sector).

But no one can deny the importance of building effective human rights institutions. We must ensure that all people are aware of their human rights and what claims they hold on States and non-State actors, such as corporations. And we must approach realization of human rights from both ends: building the capacity of governments to promote human rights, and building the capacity of people to demand and claim their rights.

An enduring challenge is to ensure that all people see the relevance of human rights for their own lives, and the way that human rights are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. All of us in the human rights community have fallen short in demonstrating this in past decades. But this is essential going forward.

One building block we can be thankful for is how the issues of human rights and international development are increasingly linked in both theory and practice. When I began my term as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in September 1997, the human rights work of the UN was largely isolated from the activities of the UN at headquarters or in countries around the world in development and peace keeping.

Over the next five years this changed. The UN Commission on Human Rights appointed experts in areas such as education, food and the highest attainable standard of health - all of whom have made substantive contributions to advancing the agenda on understanding these issues as rights which the majority of governments have legally committed to progressively implement over time. Now the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, for instance, analyzes how the spread of biofuels undermines food security. The UN Independent Expert on Extreme Poverty makes recommendations on how to protect the poorest communities from the global financial crisis.
The Millennium Declaration in September 2000 made specific references to the international human rights agenda and the importance of respect for human rights to sustainable development. And UN agencies such as the UN Development Program – UNDP - the World Health Organization and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) are increasingly integrating human rights in their programming.

So it is right to say that in this new century we have turned the corner on acknowledging the importance of human rights. I am sure that from now on human rights activists and organizations in every region will give greater priority to promoting economic and social rights alongside equally important civil and political rights. I believe that NGOs such as Amnesty International, which last year launched their Demand Dignity campaign, will make a permanent shift in this direction.

Equally important, development organizations such as Oxfam have moved towards using human rights in their work. Many have adopted a human rights based approach and promote human rights centered development. What does this mean? It means, for example, that programs to support health, education and livelihoods are not just responding to needs, as charity, but are making clear that governments have obligations to progressively realize rights for their populations. It means tackling inequalities of all kinds – inequalities that might be based on gender, ethnicity or religion. It recognizes that discrimination and inequality are root causes of poverty and underdevelopment. A human rights approach acknowledges people’s participation as agents of their own development being central to sustainable development. And it reinforces the importance of accountability of governments to respect, protect and fulfill human rights. From NGOs to The World Bank, the link between transparency, accountability and political inclusion – all values central to human rights – are widely recognized, as is the frequently devastating impact on development of corrupt and oppressive rule.

Let me turn now to reflect briefly on some of the lessons from our work at Realizing Rights which I believe can help inform others committed to shaping more just and equitable societies around the world. Perhaps the most useful examples I can give are
from the way in which we hope that human rights will inform the UN Development Summit in September which will examine progress on the UN Millennium Development Goals. These eight goals were agreed by the world’s governments in the wake of the UN Millennium Declaration in September 2000. As many of you will know, the MDGs are measurable targets to be achieved by 2015 that cover areas including extreme poverty, hunger, decent work opportunities, health, education and the environment.

Progress to date has been mixed, and if the poverty reduction and improvements in development in China are taken out of the equation, progress in much of the rest of the world is insufficient. Many of us believe that if human rights frameworks and standards were central to development, progress would be accelerated.

At Realizing Rights we have a program addressing the scourge of maternal mortality – the MDG for which progress has been slowest. Maternal health is a development goal for which a human rights approach is absolutely critical to achieving success. This is because discrimination against women, as well as discrimination and inequality based on other factors like poverty and ethnicity, have been shown to undermine maternal health.

What can be done to address this situation in practical terms? First, we must redouble our efforts to strengthen national health systems with the goal of ensuring universal access to health services, including to emergency obstetric services and care.

Second, and related to this, is the need to support the requisite human resources for health systems to enable efficient utilization of funding. On the one hand, this means paying health workers a decent wage and improving their living and working conditions. On the other hand, it means addressing the workforce shortage caused by migration of health workers – not preventing migration, but finding ways to provide adequate numbers of health professionals to ensure realization of the right to health of those in the sending country. Donor countries must ensure policy coherence in this area as well.

Third, we must combat gender inequality and discrimination against women. Maternal health is affected by discrimination that is perpetuated by governments and within broader society - violence against women, early marriage, and poor nutrition for girls and
women must be tackled not only in law and policy-making, but also in households and communities. As many have said, maternal health indicators are a proxy for inequity in health systems and in societies more broadly.

Fourth is the need to significantly expand access to family planning. But we cannot overlook the deeper issues that contribute to this problem – the lack of respect for the sexual and reproductive rights of women, and the frequency of ‘botched’ abortions, for example, have enormous impacts on maternal health. While these are sensitive issues, we must not shy away from tackling them.

We must mount effective advocacy efforts at every level, involving a wide range of partners, so that governments recognize the need to implement programs addressing the structural impediments to achieving maternal health.

Another issue we will focus on at the Development Summit is the right to decent work for all. This has four pillars. The first is increasing the capacity and policy space of governments to put job creation at the center of macroeconomic policy. The second is ensuring respect for labor rights and all human rights at work. The third is expanding social dialogue between governments, employers, workers and others in civil society. And the fourth is expanding social protection systems – such as health insurance and pensions – for everyone.

We at Realizing Rights have been working with a range of partners to support efforts in this area over the last several years. This is because we know that decent work is central to having a life lived with dignity. We know that people around the world experience globalization as positive or negative based on how it affects their own work opportunities. And we know that the tenets of decent work I just mentioned must apply to everyone, not just those in the formal economy. In the 21st century we must ensure that people labouring on farms or vending on streets are also given decent work opportunities. Governments, UN agencies and civil society organizations like Realizing Rights are showing how this can be done. The Universal Declaration includes “just and favourable conditions of work” and “fair remuneration for work” as basic human rights. Private
sector companies and our global trade system must take account of these basic rights and promote them.

Another strategy we believe is key in advancing human rights in the 21st century is strengthening women’s leadership at every level. Realizing Rights is working with many others to bring the voices of marginalized women into the public arena by connecting international women leaders to women at the local and national levels, generally in the context of conflict and post-conflict situations. We know that women and girls are a force for positive change in society, and that positive change comes about when women’s and girls’ rights are protected and when individuals are empowered and enabled to reach their potential.

One example of our efforts involves United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security which will mark its 10th anniversary in October of this year. Over the past decade, despite greater calls for action, the reality of women in conflict situations around the world continues to be one of insecurity and the worst forms of human rights abuse. Despite their expertise in security issues and their critical role as peace builders in their own communities, the voices of women are rarely heard as part of conflict resolution and reconciliation processes. It is critical that the international community uses this anniversary to re-focus efforts on commitments made to the world’s women.

We are working with partner organizations in a new Civil Society Advisory Group which advises the Deputy Secretary General and a steering committee of heads of UN agencies on how to improve on-the-ground actions to protect women in the context of armed conflict and strengthen their participation in peace processes, post-conflict governance and reconstruction.

Our group of prominent, dedicated experts who are advising on such issues as protection of women from sexual violence in displacement settings; developing accountability mechanisms; assessing gaps in current resources and recommending new funding sources
to support regional and country-level implementation and training for women at the local level, and working with UN leadership and member states to develop new commitments for action. We hope this tenth anniversary of UNSCR 1325 will be marked by practical actions not just fine rhetoric.

I want to mention one final contemporary challenge which must be included in our human rights strategies for the 21st century: climate change. It is imperative that we consider the ethical, justice and human rights dimensions of climate change, and how the world of academia can influence leaders to take action urgently.

I am often asked why I focus more and more on the issue of climate change given my lifelong focus on human rights. The answer is two-fold. First, because climate change poses the greatest threat to human rights – and to poverty reduction and global development – that the world has ever seen. Second, and just as important, I care about the issue of climate change because as a grandmother, I feel very responsible for the mistakes we are making today that will leave a dangerous legacy for future generations. At the end of this year I will return to Ireland to work with others on climate justice.

Last week in New York I listened to three climate wise women. They are grassroots activists who are speaking out about how climate change has adversely affected their communities: Constance Okollet, a peasant farmer from Eastern Uganda who became an activist after heavy rains destroyed the homes and food supply of her village; Ulamila Kurai Wragg, a veteran journalist who had witnessed first hand the diverse impacts of climate change in Fiji and the Cook Islands; and Sharon Hanshaw, the Executive Director of Coastal Women for Change, who is helping to rebuild Biloxi, Mississippi following the destruction wrought by hurricane Katrina. A fourth activist Ursula Rakova from the Carteret Islands, South Pacific, joined by video as she is helping to voluntarily relocate 1,700 neighbors whose island and food supply are rapidly eroding. I believe that progress on climate change has been hampered by the image of climate change as a problem for the future, and one that affects polar bears and arctic ice more than it affects the individuals and communities already in Asia, Africa and small island states.
As we know, in arid regions from Africa to India, rainfall patterns have changed so much that drought and flooding happen regularly. The regular rhythm of seasons has changed. The incidence of severe storms is increasing, taking the lives especially of the poor, destroying farms and livelihoods, and ruining infrastructure like roads, schools and health clinics. In low-lying parts of the world, from Bangladesh to the Maldives, sea level rise will wipe out whole nations and cultures. These are only some of the human impacts from climate change facing people across the world. And in turn these impacts cause others, not least an increase in migration, and greater conflict over land, water and other resources. The right to development, to work, to health, to education, and to life itself – these are all under threat.

The damage results from the greenhouse gas emissions caused by the carbon based growth developed countries have benefitted from. We need principles of climate justice to redress the damage done in an equitable way. I was in Copenhagen during the climate negotiations. Over one hundred thousand people marched in a vigil to show their shared commitment to climate justice. There and around the world people called for a fair, ambitious and binding deal in Copenhagen.

But the talks in Copenhagen were hugely disappointing. They fell into finger-pointing rather than taking shared responsibility. This leaves us on a path to a disastrous level of global warming. Just as governments hold obligations to respect, protect and fulfill human rights, they hold obligations to negotiate fair, ambitious and binding commitments to mitigate and adapt to climate change. My organization is working with many others to ensure that the human rights community - and the development community – begins to take on climate justice as a priority issue. We believe that the poorest have a right to development, and that this must be low carbon sustainable development. To achieve this will require a huge scale-up in the transfer of green technologies to the poorest.

The world cannot afford brinksmanship on the issue of climate change – we need the best political leadership possible. The costs are huge, but the costs of inaction are far larger.
Our global institutions can make progress on global challenges when national leaders and international institutions show true leadership.

I recognize that meeting these challenges won’t be easy. The geo-political environment of 2010 is in many ways a more difficult one than ten years ago. Whenever I speak with civil society groups and human rights advocates around the world, I continue to hear about government clamp downs on protests, the incarceration, repression and silencing of social activism, the efforts made to undermine the voices and perspectives of grass roots movements for change.

Equally troubling, civil society – and many governments – increasingly cite multilateral processes which fail to produce effective results. The Copenhagen climate change conference has raised deeper concerns about the ability of the international community to reach fair and binding decisions on key governance challenges.

I have faith that we can succeed in making human rights a reality for all in the 21st century. But we will need more advocates in countries across the world – including here in the United States. As I meet many young people across this country - I feel hope for the future. You may not speak the language of human rights – but you understand and are committed to ideas of fairness, of transparency and greater accountability in public and private institutions. We need you to help ensure that human rights are reflected - explicitly or implicitly - in the public and political agenda from the local to the global level. Whether it is jobs, development, trade, security or climate change, our challenge is to articulate a roadmap that reflects these human rights principles and approaches.

In this century, academic institutions like Stanford, governments, NGOs, faith-based groups, companies and others have an opportunity to reaffirm and give true meaning to what Article 1 of the Universal Declaration proclaimed more than 60 years ago - *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights*. That statement is as meaningful and as important today as it was in 1948. Our challenge is to ensure that it
comes to life for all people – both in our own neighborhoods and in the one global village we all inhabit.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to return to Stanford and speak with you this evening.

Thank you.