



**The Permanent Mission of Iceland  
to the United Nations**

**Statement by  
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by congratulating His Excellency, Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, on his election as President of the 66<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. I can assure him that he will have the fullest cooperation of the Icelandic delegation.

Mr. President,

We have in recent weeks witnessed the worst hunger crisis of this century in the Horn of Africa. It is a devastating reminder that fighting poverty and hunger still is the most important and challenging undertaking of our times.

Our collective duty and responsibility is to help our weakest sisters, our weakest brothers. We, from the wealthier nations, must do better to provide relief, must act with more speed and more generosity to those that are deprived of the basic necessities of life – food and water.

In Iceland, we have indeed decided to do so.

I'm happy to tell you that the Icelandic Parliament has unanimously agreed to substantially increase our contribution to developing nations in the coming financial year. It has also accepted a time-bound plan to raise our aid to the goal of 0.7 per cent of the Gross National Income. That is our pledge, agreed by every party in our Parliament.

Mr. President,

The fight against hunger and poverty is the same fight we wage to protect our planet from the ravages caused by the greed of our own species. Next year we celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bright new vision introduced by the historic Earth Summit in Rio. In these 20 years, deep concern for the environment has indeed moved to the forefront of the global agenda. But the sobering truth is that the ambitions of Rio are still a far cry from being realized. Actions are still needed. If there ever was a time to act boldly, that time is now.

The key theme of Rio will be the Green Economy. I assure you, Mr. President, that my country has expertise that can add to the fuel of a green revolution. Our record speaks. Renewable energy, marine health, sustainable use of land, and not least – gender equality, always the core of the Icelandic foreign policy. These are the issues we shall bring to Rio next year.

What we really need is a revolution. A green revolution. A seismic shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy. That is the only way to turn the ship.

In Iceland we have a breaking-edge technology that we want to share – on geothermal. That splendid form of renewable energy is the most undervalued and overlooked source of cheap power in the world. Geothermal is certainly not a silver bullet. But it needs to be a part of the portfolio we have to develop to solve the emission problem. In Central and South America, East Africa and Southeast Asia there are vast areas literally brimming with geothermal potential. Icelandic know-how with outside finance could go a long way to make these areas self-sufficient in terms of green energy.

Mr. President,

You will of course know that Iceland, as one of the largest fishing nations, is deeply protective of the health of the oceans. Today, climatic change threatens to put the fisheries of the world under a new strain. As we speak the acidification of the oceans, due to human emission of carbon, is affecting the health of the marine environment. This is especially true for the Arctic and its vicinity. As a marine biologist I fear that sooner than later this may affect the world's fishing stocks, a vital source of protein for more than a billion people.

Mr. President,

This is just one more argument why we urgently need to conclude a post-Kyoto agreement later this year on the reduction of greenhouse gases.

Ladies and gentlemen, every day the Arctic is a silent witness to the impact of climate change. The snow I experienced as a kid is today fast becoming a rare event for my two teenage daughters. The sad truth is that the Arctic glaciers and the Arctic sea-ice are melting at a much faster rate than anyone ever anticipated.

The disappearance of the sea-ice will open up new and shorter transport routes from the Pacific to the North-Atlantic. We most certainly also will see huge areas open up for exploitation of oil and gas resources.

But this will come with a price. The climatic changes force the Arctic people, like our neighbours in Greenland, to change their habits of life. These changes will also melt up the

tundra, a carbon buffer to the climatic systems, and thus accelerate the warming of the planet. The already fragile ecosystem of the Arctic will become even more brittle.

Let's remember what happened in the Mexican Gulf, and let's be aware that oil breaks down very slowly in the extreme cold of the Arctic. We should not allow the exploitation of the Arctic without the strictest rules being applied. That must be the precondition for every human move into the Arctic resources.

Mr. President,

I am often asked if a country like Iceland, that is not small – but admittedly with a bit fewer people than most – can have any say on issues of global concern, be it in Rio or New York.

To lift a phrase from a famous statesman who spoke from this podium few days ago: “Yes, we can.” Twenty years ago, in 1991, Iceland watched on television how thousands of brave Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians took their destiny in their own hands. They reached out to the international community, to the people of Iceland among others, and asked for help to break the ice for international recognition.

The great British statesman, Lord Palmerston, once made a famous statement to the effect that there is no such thing as eternal friendship between nations and that only eternal interests decide how nations react to each other. This is a mantra that still today is taught at every bad school of political science.

If Palmerston's words had prevailed, Iceland would have turned a deaf ear to the call of the fighters for freedom in the Baltics.

She did not.

In the historic year of 1991 Iceland became the first to recognize the restored sovereignty of the Baltic States.

This she did out of respect for the principles that are vitally important for small nations, the right to choose your own destiny, to carve out your own future, the right of small nations to be independent.

Principles, Mr. President, do matter in politics.

On the same principle that led Iceland to recognize the Baltic States in 1991, we today also support the Palestinian struggle for statehood.

On that very same principle Iceland feels we should welcome Palestine as a new Member State to the United Nations, based on the borders before 1967 – exactly the same criteria as laid down by the EU, by the Quartet, and lately by President Obama in his speech in May.

Mr. President,

I have been to Gaza. I have talked to the people, the fishermen that no longer can ply their trade, the young people that have no employment, the families that need a roof over their heads.

I have also been to the West Bank. I have seen with my own eyes how the land of the Palestinians is literally cut to pieces by horrible walls of separation.

This is wrong. This is unjust. This is against every moral code that Iceland has ever stood for as a guardian of human rights.

Palestine is doing the same as Israel did in 1947 – and Iceland supported. Israel took her case to the UN and emerged with statehood. Palestine deserves the same. It is hypocrisy to suggest otherwise.

In the middle of the democratic revolution brought on by the fresh breeze of the Arabic spring and induced not least by young people and women, it would be foolish to deny Palestine her right to statehood. It would be against reconciliation in the region.

Iceland will therefore vote yes when a resolution on the Palestinian statehood comes to a vote in the General Assembly.

Furthermore, the Icelandic Government is determined to fully recognize Palestine and will next week put to the Parliament of Iceland a resolution on the recognition of Palestine as a sovereign and independent state.

This is the Icelandic message to you.

Thank you Mr. President.