



Statement by

H.E. Mrs. Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland

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iceland

First time candidate to the
Security Council 2009-2010

Check against delivery

New challenges - Solid cornerstones

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election. At the same time I would like to pay tribute to the work of your predecessor H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa.

I.

World community based on human rights

On this occasion I want to state how much my country has benefited from the existence of the United Nations. The universal values enshrined in the UN Charter and the Declaration on Human Rights have given a context and perspective to our sovereignty and self-determination and Iceland's story is a testimony to the fact that it is through civilised co-existence within the community of nations that societies prosper.

Iceland progressed, within living memory, from the position of being one of the poorest countries in Europe to one of the most prosperous. We have had the good fortune to be able to build a Nordic welfare society on the sustainable harvesting of our natural resources.

As a small, dynamic state without a military it is our natural inclination to look for the peaceful settlement of disputes within the international community.

Our independence, which we achieved some sixty years ago, is built on more than our democratic institutions, fundamentally important though they are.

Our freedom, in the largest sense, has been achieved through economic development as well as the guarantee of human rights and democracy. In our experience, freedom is complex and multifaceted.

All human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. But it is evident that poverty, inequality and the lack of economic and social rights can make the exercise of political and civil rights difficult.

We are now about half way to our deadline for the Millennium Development Goals. The year 2015 is around the corner and we will soon need to deliver on our promises.

There has been some good news: it seems likely that the goal of halving the number of people living in extreme poverty by 2015 will be reached. However, progress on many of the human development goals, such as child mortality, has been disappointing. Regional challenges remain, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

It is incumbent upon those who have the good fortune to be prosperous to join in solidarity with others to make these rights available to all. What is more, the security challenges which we face

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this century are such that they can only be addressed together, in solidarity with others. Climate change is a prime example.

II.

Solidarity through development

Indeed, the phenomenon of climate change is already devastating the lives of millions, across a broad swathe of Africa, among many small island states and widely in Asia. Every region and most countries can expect to feel the effects of climate change in the near future.

How we address this issue as an international community is a test of our commitment to the fundamental values of the UN and our ability to act together in light of our shared responsibility. The discussions that took place earlier this week were an important step in identifying means and measures in this respect, and I thank the Secretary General for his initiative.

Although climate change is a global phenomenon, it tends to be the poorest in developing countries who are hardest hit – those who are least responsible for causing climate change. Climate change is thus a severe threat to poverty reduction.

It is important that the international community does not treat adaptation to climate change as a standalone issue, but as an integral part of our common efforts in attaining the Millennium Development Goals. A comprehensive approach is needed if we are to see results.

The Government of Iceland is committed to showing solidarity with the most vulnerable in adapting to the effects of climate change.

III.

Women's empowerment

Mr. President

Iceland regards women's empowerment and full participation at all levels as a fundamental issue for the New Millennium. Whether it be in relation to peace and security, health, poverty or climate change, empowerment of women is key to success. Women and men need to be equally represented and listened to everywhere.

I would like to reiterate Iceland's support for the recommendations of the Panel on System Wide Coherence regarding gender equality and women's empowerment. The current UN structure and approach to gender issues is too fragmented. The excellent work of UNIFEM must be built upon and reinforced within the new structures.

We firmly support the establishment of a new gender entity to strengthen the UN's performance in this field of work. Establishing the post of Under-Secretary General for gender equality issues should provide strong leadership and coordination, and it is my hope that this post will be quickly filled. Gender mainstreaming has to be addressed throughout the whole UN system in a more systematic manner.

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Let us use the current momentum to bring this process forward at this session of the General Assembly.

IV.

Development as freedom

Mr. President

Official development assistance plays a vital role in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Let me state clearly that Iceland views these goals as common goals. We see development as mutually beneficial co-operation. Freedom for Iceland has been built through development and it is a vital element of freedom for all peoples.

Donors need to deliver on their promises and accelerate their efforts in increasing development assistance. The Government of Iceland stands ready to shoulder its responsibility; our Official Development Assistance has doubled over the past four years and we aim to be among the top ODA contributors.

Increased aid effectiveness is central to development results. The Government of Iceland believes that the UN should be at the forefront of such efforts. We support the follow-up on the Report of the High-level Panel on System Wide Coherence, which, in our view, will make the UN more effective in delivering results on the ground.

ODA is of course not a panacea. We need to make progress in international trade negotiations. When I had the privilege of attending the meeting of the African Union in Accra this summer, I was made aware by colleagues of the tremendous potential that African countries see in closer integration across that continent.

In a globalised world closer regional cooperation and integration including trade relations has, in our experience, been a step towards a better future; a joint investment of nation-states in their common well-being.

V.

Responding to Climate Change

Mr. President

Iceland pledges full political support to our common goal of halting global warming. Bearing in mind that there is now a window of opportunity, which may close within a decade, the IPCC is to be taken seriously in its recommendations of halving of emissions. Iceland has set itself a long-term aspirational goal of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by 50-75% by 2050.

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The Kyoto Protocol provides a basis for effective action by developed nations, who must lead the way in controlling emissions. But Kyoto is not universal, and it is not enough. Iceland believes that the Bali meeting should start a process leading to a comprehensive post-2012 climate agreement, ideally to be concluded in 2009, the year of the summit in Copenhagen.

There is no "silver bullet" solution to the problem of global warming. The issue of deforestation, especially the rain forests, has to be addressed. The role of new technology is crucial, particularly in regard to alternative, sustainable and clean sources of energy. In the field of geothermal energy, where Iceland has considerable experience, there is wide scope for development.

New technology must not, however, exacerbate the very serious problems we already face. It is, for example, a matter of grave concern that increases in production of biomass-based energy sources could be raising food prices. New sources of renewable energy must also adhere strictly to long-term environmental demands. This is particularly relevant to the planned build-up of nuclear energy reactors.

The creativity and research capabilities of universities, the commitment and inclusiveness of NGOs and the drive of business and industry must be activated in a broad and consistent effort. Governments cannot do this alone.

VI.

Human Security and Peace

Mr. President.

Iceland regards human security, as formulated for example by the 2005 UN Summit, to be of fundamental political and conceptual importance when it comes to discussing and deciding on action concerning peace and security. A key instrument for ensuring human security is Security Council Resolution 1325, which needs to be thoroughly implemented.

Millions of individuals experience assaults on their personal security.

I am thinking of the brutality inflicted by some governments on their own people and by terrorists or irregular forces on civilians. In this context, allow me to express deep concern over events in Myanmar, where the democratically elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been held in detention for years and where peaceful expression of political dissent is at present being brutally repressed.

I am thinking of the attacks on providers of humanitarian aid in many conflict regions. I am thinking of the failure of authorities around the world to ensure the protection of women and children from violence and trafficking. In this context, I would also like to encourage other member states to support the resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

Mr President

I would like to express appreciation for the efforts of the UN Secretary General, together with the African Union Commission Chairman in finding a way forward towards alleviating the suffering of the people of Darfur, together with the Security Council. There is, however, still much to be done.

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Crucial discussions are in process these days to solve the decades long situation in the Middle East. It is clear to me that most people in Israel and Palestine yearn for peace. Indeed, opinion polls bear this out. In particular, women from both sides voice their distress at the long-term effects of continued conflict on their children, who are the future of this region.

The talks in progress at the moment, with the support of the Quartet, the efforts of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, and most important, the efforts of the Israeli and Palestinian governments, give some hope.

I would encourage political leaders to ensure that the will for peace among a great many people on both sides is reflected in the political process. This requires political courage and true leadership. It requires restraint when restraint is most difficult. It requires a determination to outflank the spoilers on both sides, who would wish to sacrifice the real prospects of a peaceful and fulfilling life for millions to a distant mirage of some unattainable utopia.

Final status issues, which are critical to the Palestinians and the Israelis, must be on the agenda for the peace conference which the President of the United States has proposed. The outcome must give both sides a clear view of a realistic and acceptable future for their children. Meanwhile, all who have it in their power bear a responsibility to do their utmost to ensure the humanitarian needs of the civilian population.

Mr. President

Jordan and Syria, neighbouring states of Iraq, have made generous provision for hundreds of thousands of refugees from Iraq. Iceland is determined to contribute to alleviating the suffering of the Iraqi people and has pledged funds to UNHCR for the provision of schooling to Iraqi children in Jordan. We also stand firmly behind UN mandated efforts to assist in the stabilisation and rebuilding of the country.

Clearly, a major threat to human security as well as state security is the proliferation of arms. Iceland regrets the current situation in the fields of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. Despite sustained efforts by the majority of Member States over a number of years, only limited progress has been achieved, some of it outside the UN framework. Our failures in this area pose a constant threat to peace and security. Now is the time to renew our efforts. The conclusion of an arms trade treaty would certainly be a significant achievement.

A number of projects launched by the UN Summit of 2005 have made steady progress, including the establishment of the Human Rights Council and of the Peacebuilding Commission. The outcome document of the 2005 Summit also tasked the General Assembly with reform of the Security Council. *The momentum for completing this work must be maintained so that the Security Council can be more representative of our world in the beginning of the 21st century.* This would entail an increase in the number of elected and permanent seats.

VII.

Iceland is a candidate for the Security Council

Mr. President

Iceland has been an active and committed member of the United Nations since 1946. In light of the principle of rotation and the importance of all member states sharing in the responsibility of serving on the Security Council, we notified in 2000 our first time candidacy for a seat for the period 2009-2010, with elections to be held next autumn. This candidature, which is actively supported by the other Nordic states, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, reflects Iceland's firm commitment to play an active role in cooperation with others in addressing the most pressing security threats of the 21st Century.

As a Nordic country we stand for a long tradition of active commitment to the UN and to the best interests of the whole. The Nordics have a reputation for being bridge builders – trusted mediators in complex situations.

Iceland seeks to shoulder the responsibility to exercise with fairness and firmness the role of a Security Council member.

Mr. President, thank you