



Statement by

H.E. Mr. David Oddsson  
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland

at the

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the General Assembly of the United Nations

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Mr. President

I would like to join those who have expressed thanks to the Secretary General for his efforts in recent years in addressing the very serious issues facing the international community.

Mr. President

Iceland had high expectations of the outcome of last week's Summit, which are only partly met in its concluding document. Much further work is needed.

While most of the key values in the Charter are reaffirmed, it is Iceland's view that human rights and the accountability of states to their citizens are insufficiently dealt with.

The United Nations Charter guarantees equality between nations and provides a basis on which they can live together as good neighbours. The Charter addresses, however, not only how relations should be conducted between governments; it also lays down how governments should conduct themselves towards their peoples. This is what the Secretary General has called "the accountability of states to their citizens".

Iceland supports his strong statement on the responsibility carried by the international community in cases of massive human rights abuses or genocide. The United Nations have made significant progress in this respect by recognising that an international responsibility to protect exists. The Security Council and other institutions have thus been given a clear mandate — indeed a clear duty — to act where crimes against humanity are committed.

Democracy and respect for universal human rights is of central importance to security and development. Iceland supports the establishment of the United Nations Democracy Fund and will contribute to it. We are also strongly in favour of reforming the present human rights machinery. The Commission on Human Rights is dysfunctional and devoid of credibility. Deliberations on human rights have suffered accordingly. Moreover, the credibility of the entire United Nations organisation is threatened. There now exists a mandate from the Summit to establish a Human Rights Council, which "will be responsible for promoting universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms".

For Iceland the ideal Human Rights Council will be smaller than the Commission and will be in session all year, so that it can respond to emergencies. The composition of the new Council is fundamental to its effectiveness. It must not include major human rights abusers.

The Summit committed member states to making all efforts to conclude a comprehensive convention on international terrorism. Such a convention must unconditionally condemn terrorism. For it to be fully effective, it must include a legal definition of terrorist acts.

Unfortunately, the risk of terrorism combined with weapons of mass destruction is not dealt with in the Summit document, since it fails to address the proliferation of such weapons. Proliferation is a profound danger which the United Nations cannot ignore, but must confront in a decisive manner.

Iceland welcomes the emphasis in the document on investing in prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. We welcome in particular the proposal to create a Peacebuilding Commission and a Support Office within the Secretariat. Iceland is willing to take part with other member states in ensuring that both are up and running by the end of the year.

Mr. President

I must express disappointment that the G4 proposal for reforming the Security Council has not yet received the support it deserves. While not perfect, it remains the most practical basis for reforming the Security Council. Therefore, this approach continues to have Iceland's firm support. The Council must reflect the world as it is and be representative. Iceland has previously in this forum expressed its interest in participating actively in the work of the Council in the years 2009 and 2010.

The Millennium Declaration provides the platform to address poverty in the developing countries. Developed countries have committed themselves to provide the necessary support in the form of official development assistance. It is no less important for developing countries to create a transparent and accountable environment that respects good governance and the rule of law, in order to attract domestic and foreign investment, which fosters the growth of a vibrant private sector. It is also important for developed and developing countries to ensure a successful outcome of the current WTO negotiations.

The Government of Iceland has acknowledged the great challenge posed by the Millennium Development Goals. Accordingly, it will continue to substantially increase Iceland's official development assistance in the coming years.

Mr. President

Iceland is committed to reform of the United Nations Organisation and to finding common ways of dealing with threats to international security. The Summit document has serious shortcomings and the risk remains that the United Nations could be further weakened. The member states must ensure that the process continues and that it will in the coming weeks and months deliver on the fundamental issues at hand for peace and prosperity in the world.