



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

**Statement by
H.E. Mr. Geir H. Haarde
Prime Minister of Iceland**

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Iceland
First time candidate to the
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Mr. President,

Let me first of all join others in offering congratulations on your election as the President of the 63rd General Assembly of the United Nations and pledge Iceland's support and cooperation in the important work which lies ahead of us.

Mr. President,

Almost all UN member states sent athletes to compete in the Beijing Summer Olympic Games, where the world witnessed outstanding sportsmanship, both in terms of performance and conduct. The Olympics have become a global venue where there is no contradiction between the demonstration of international solidarity and positive patriotism. While recognizing that the example of such a sporting event cannot be applied directly to international relations, it could still be an inspiration as we seek ways to make our organization more effective in dealing with the immense global challenges of the 21st Century. The Olympics reflect a human commonality and aspiration which should be our point of departure.

I.

Extreme Poverty

Extreme poverty continues to remain an obstacle to development and security in large parts of the world. Despite considerable accomplishments in the reduction of poverty, this is still the single most daunting challenge facing mankind and the source of so many other problems with global repercussions. Experience shows that a combination of local, regional and international initiatives are usually required to eradicate the manifold causes of poverty. This includes additional resources for development cooperation. We, the international community, must fulfil the promises we made to our most vulnerable constituents eking out an existence in extreme poverty – especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. They are the ones who depend most on the solidarity of the international community.

The forthcoming meeting in Doha on Financing for Development will test the resolve of the international community and, for its part, Iceland aims to be among the top ODA contributors – having already doubled its budget for development cooperation in the past four years.

II.

Interconnected challenges of sustainable development

The Secretary General has aptly referred to the “inter-connected challenges of soaring food costs, development and climate change”. Indeed, the objective of widespread sustainable development seems ever more distant. But apathy or despair is not an option because, inevitably, the cost of inaction will rise correspondingly. Action needs to be broad-based and sustained, addressing both urgent humanitarian and long-term structural issues.

Much can be done to strengthen food security. Iceland, for example, has for decades shared its experience and expertise in modern fisheries with developing coastal states, including through the work of the United Nations University Fisheries Training Programme in Reykjavík. Ninety-five percent of the people in the world dependent on harvesting living marine resources live in developing countries. We will continue to make a small but significant contribution towards improving their lives and, thereby, furthering the cause of sustainable development. Our goal of economic prosperity with environmental responsibility is the key to sustainable development and long term prosperity.

Mr. President,

The threat of climate change can only be tackled through the combined efforts of the international community. The urgency of the threat has been highlighted repeatedly by my colleagues from the small island developing states and many least-developed countries. They are the front-line states; exposed and vulnerable to the growing consequences of climate change. Ultimately though, we will all be affected. It is in this spirit that Iceland welcomes and fully supports the Pacific island initiative for a General Assembly resolution on security and climate change.

The urgent work started in Kyoto must be accelerated in Copenhagen next year and carbon emissions need to be systematically reduced. The world can only break the dependence on fossil fuels by offering efficient and economical alternatives.

Iceland is fortunate to have abundant hydroelectric and geothermal power and has already reached the goal of deriving about eighty percent of its energy consumption from clean renewable sources. The resulting expertise and technology has been made available to

developing states, and Iceland is proud to host the Geothermal Training Programme of the United Nations University.

III.

Human Rights and Gender Equality

Mr. President,

Sixty years ago Eleanor Roosevelt wisely observed that *The UN Charter is a guiding beacon along the way to the achievement of human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the world*. As we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, her words remind us of the progress already made, and the long and difficult road ahead, made more difficult by major new global challenges.

Today's world does not tolerate racial discrimination and the time has come to make sex discrimination universally unacceptable too. My government will continue to promote gender equality internationally. We will do it both through multilateral efforts within the United Nations, most notably in UNIFEM, and in the World Bank. Regrettably, gender equality and women's empowerment remain elusive goals all over the world. I urge the United Nations to lead by example.

IV.

The UN in the 21st century

Mr. President,

The challenges posed by globalization also offer new opportunities for revitalizing the UN and making our organization better equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st Century – better technology, better communications, more efficient management are all available. The UN is a long way from being a perfect mechanism, but its role in the international system is indispensable. If we settle for a UN which sometimes appears to be an abstract objective in itself, we will never fully realize the potential of this universal gathering of nations. On the other hand, if we encourage a high level of ambition and adaptability, I am convinced that the UN will live up to the ideals of its founders and be celebrated as a cornerstone of the international architecture on the centenary of the Charter in 2045.

One simple method of raising the profile of the UN as well as awareness of its important work is informing our citizens. I am pleased to inform you that the Government of Iceland intends to make the purpose and work of the UN an integral part of the curriculum at the primary and secondary levels of education in our country, in addition to the existing and more selective activities at higher levels. Iceland strongly encourages all member states to do the same. This may prove to be an effective means of offering the multilateral ideal of the UN as a part of the world-view imparted to future leaders and citizens around the globe.

Mr. President,

It is perhaps an oversimplification to speak of a contest between multilateralism and unilateralism in international affairs. These different approaches frequently overlap, but it is clear that when an effective multilateral option is available, it will always be the preferred choice for most countries, especially smaller countries like mine. This should inspire us to make the UN a forum which can deliver substantive results, in accordance with international law, in order to ensure that unilateral actions on issues of major significance become less likely.

IV.

First time candidate to the Security Council

Mr. President,

Iceland has been a responsible and active member of the United Nations since 1946 and is now for the first time seeking to serve as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, with the full support of the other four Nordic countries. The election will take place in this chamber in three weeks time.

Throughout the history of the United Nations, the Nordic countries have been key contributors to the organization's peacekeeping and development assistance activities, and have been able to play a role which is disproportionate to their share of the global population. Above all, the Nordic countries have shown unwavering commitment to multilateral cooperation and the rule of law. If elected as a member of the UN Security Council, Iceland will continue in this strong tradition.

We seek the seat as a democratic state not in conflict with other countries; as a state with a history of solving its disputes peacefully; as a state that respects universal human rights; and as a state without substantial geopolitical interests and, therefore, a state that can approach issues with a certain objectivity. We see our candidature not only from a national perspective. It is also a test of whether the smaller member states of our organization, from all the regional groups, can have an opportunity to serve on the Council and, thus, reinforce its legitimacy. The election of Iceland would bolster the principle of sovereign equality and equitable representation.

Mr. President,

Academics sometimes associate certain periods in history with countries or regions, as a way of highlighting predominant characteristics or trends. It would reflect well on us here today, if we have the foresight and courage to take measures in coming years, which would give future historians reason to refer to the 21st Century as the Century of the United Nations.

Thank you