



The Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations

**Statement by
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Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by congratulating His Excellency Mr. Joseph Deiss on his election as President of the 65th General Assembly, and assure him of the cooperation of the Icelandic delegation.

Mr. President,

When I spoke for the first time from this distinguished podium last year, my country was ravaged by financial crisis. It left Iceland with a total collapse of the entire banking system. Our financial crisis was exacerbated by the world-wide recession, but to a large extent it was made in Iceland. It was the product of a system that embraced the neo-liberalistic view of rampant capitalism with lax regulations.

Economic emergency laws had to be passed and we needed the helping hand of our close family in the North, the Nordic nations, not least the Faroese, our friends the Poles, in the form of currency loans, just to prevent our society from a melt-down.

Now, Mr. President, we have swallowed the bitter medicine of fiscal cuts and radical financial reforms. We, as you know, embarked on a close cooperation with the IMF. We have applied for membership of the European Union, on which the Icelandic people will decide in a referendum in due time.

A specially appointed prosecutor is handling the cases of bankers that allegedly broke the law. This week parliament is debating whether to prosecute former ministers. So, we took firm, decisive action.

Well, I can tell you, the medicine worked. Iceland is pulling through. We are on the road to recovery. We are blessed with ample resources in the form of fish in the ocean, the fierce power of our water-falls and geothermal geysers, and of course a pristine nature that supports a flourishing tourism. Economic growth is, finally, slowly returning to Iceland.

I am therefore most happy to inform you, distinguished audience, that this summer the IMF declared that technically the recession in Iceland is over. And I want to use this opportunity to thank you for your support.

Mr. President,

The crisis turned our eyes back to what really matters in life, the core-values of democracy and human rights.

At home, we have taken important steps to change the constitution to increase people's power. And we are proud of having legally ensured full equality of same-sex partnerships, and strongly urge other nations to remove all discrimination based on sexual orientation.

As you know, our foreign policy has always reflected high priority on gender equality. This year, we celebrate that 95 years have passed since women gained the right to vote, and 30 years ago a woman was first elected President in Iceland. And as you saw for yourself when she spoke here earlier this week, the Icelandic Government is now led by a woman.

In New York we also have a cause to celebrate. Iceland for years has supported a new and consolidated gender entity of the UN – and look, today it is a reality! Well done, UN! You deserve a big pile of thanks for your vision! I tell you Iceland will be a strong supporter of UN Women, as we have been through the transitional phase.

Another cause for this assembly to celebrate is that next month is the ten year anniversary of resolution 1325. It has been a priority of our foreign policy, and let the nations of the UN combine to celebrate by raising the participation of women in peace negotiations. Empowering women is empowering society!

But it is exactly with reference to women's rights that we have learned with utter sadness about the decision of Iranian courts to stone to death an Iranian woman, Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani.

President Ahmadinejad, on behalf of the Icelandic people I ask you to spare Ashtiani.

Mr. President,

When we address the looming dangers of climatic change, human rights are also at stake.

Climate change will wreak havoc in the lives of a great number of people. It will erode what we as an international community have defined as their basic human rights.

Let me take three different examples:

The small island nations in the Pacific are threatened by rising sea levels to such an extent, that whole nations might be forced to leave. The land of their forbearers, Kiribati for instance.

The floods in Pakistan caused death to many and devastation to dozens of millions of people.

The melting of the Arctic ice may prevent my neighbours, the Inuits, from pursuing their traditional lifestyle based on hunting on the ice.

All this is aggravated by the limitless use of fossil fuels that literally is tipping the delicate balance of nature.

We, the wealthy nations of the world, are therefore paying for the quality of our good life with the human rights of others.

If we don't take drastic action, Mr President, more radical than that agreed in Copenhagen, the future will see our generations as serial offenders against the human rights of peoples in need.

At the same time millions of people lack the access to safe drinking water and sanitation. It is a firm position of my government that the right to safe drinking water and basic sanitation should be recognized as a human right, essential for the real and full enjoyment of life and all other human rights.

Mr. President,

In the fight against climatic change Iceland tries to lead by example. We already meet 80% of our energy needs by renewables – far higher than any other nation can claim. We have campaigned for a new Global Climate Fund with the goal of financing transfer of green technologies to the developing countries.

Iceland also wants to contribute in another way. As you know we have not been able to stop volcano glaciers from erupting with huge clouds of ash, but we have learned to harness the fierce power of the fire beneath, and turn it to use in the form of geothermal energy.

Geothermal will of course not on its own solve the climatic problems, but in some parts of the world it could, however, make a huge difference.

In East-Africa the utilization of geothermal potential could free the people of several nations from the bondage of energy-poverty. They do, however, lack the geothermal expertise – and the finance for the infrastructure.

Iceland, therefore, has formally engaged in discussions with some of the big nations operating, for example in East Africa, to form a partnership for a geothermal drive in countries with unused potential. Iceland would put up the expertise. The partners the necessary finance. This initiative could enable some countries to escape from energy-poverty, industrialise without undue emissions, and embark on the road to prosperity.

Mr. President,

Human rights can not be debated without discussing the plight of the Palestinians and the people of Gaza.

We now have the results of the experts, mandated by the Human Rights Council, who conclude that Israel broke international law by attacking the flotilla bringing humanitarian assistance to Gaza last spring.

Iceland has strongly condemned the raid. It drew strong reaction from the Icelandic society at large.

The Icelandic nation is deeply sympathetic towards the plight of the Palestinians, held in occupation, by an oppressing power. And as I speak, we have Icelandic humanitarian workers being held up in Israel, trying to bring prosthetic limbs to people in Gaza. People that urgently need assistance. This is not acceptable to Iceland. This is not acceptable to the world. This is inhuman, unjust. We urge Israel not to prevent humanitarian assistance from reaching the needy in Gaza.

Mr. President,

Yesterday, we heard President Obama urge patience, but we also heard a hidden hope in his words.

Well, sometimes the dreams come true. Sometimes the unexpected happens. Sometimes we even have miracles. We shall of course strongly support the resumed direct talks and let's all hope and pray for a solution which will allow us, as soon as possible, to welcome the independent state of Palestine as the 193rd member of the UN family.

In the meantime, all of us should use every possible, sensible way to demonstrate our solidarity to the people of Palestine.

Iceland was not afraid to stand up and be counted on, in behalf of the people in the Baltic States almost 20 years ago, when Iceland was the first country to break the ice and recognize their resumed independence. The same happened with regard to Croatia, Slovenia and later Montenegro.

Today, Iceland is not afraid to stand up for the Palestinian people either. Every nation has a duty to defend human rights. Every nation has a duty to speak up. That is not least true for Palestine, where human rights are broken, especially in Gaza, every day.

Thank you, Mr. President.