



The Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations

STATEMENT by H.E. Mr. Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade

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Peace and security

Madam/Mr President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Next year we will celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the United Nations. As we approach this milestone it is good to reflect on the successes of our organization: the extensive codification of international law, advances in combating poverty and disease and fighting human rights abuses. We have established monitoring mechanisms like the human rights treaty bodies, accountability tools such as the International Criminal Court and agreed on historic policy targets that have transformed international cooperation, such as the Millennium Development Goals.

Madam/Mr. President

These are not small achievements.

But sitting on our laurels is not an option. This system of rule-bound relations between nations is under threat, and we must protect it.

Most worrying is the growing disregard for international law. This erodes the international legal framework we have developed since World War II.

A shocking recent example is the terrorist group operating in Iraq and Syria – the self-styled ISIS.

As human beings we are revolted by its brutality and appalled by its mindless destruction.

The international community cannot accept the disregard for the fundamental principles of the United Nations – indeed, of human decency – shown by this group.

Iceland therefore agrees with lawful actions to end these atrocities by countries in the region and from other parts of the world. Iceland will contribute humanitarian aid through UN agencies.

No civilized nation can look the other way when the barbarism and cruelty is so overwhelming.

The United Nations and international law must be center stage and we underscore the role of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security.

Madam/Mr. President

Equally shocking is the suffering of the Syrian people and the total disrespect for humanitarian law in that civil war. Almost 200.000 people have died, 3 million refugees are abroad and the country is in ruins.

The prolonged foreign occupation of the State of Palestine is another violation of international law. Land-grabbing continues unabated. The blockade of Gaza shows no signs of being lifted. Violations of human rights continue, including of freedom of movement, expression and assembly, and property rights.

This summer, a pointless war between Israel and Gaza caused unacceptable loss of life.

I condemn the indiscriminate rocket attacks from Hamas and other militant organizations in Gaza against civilian targets in Israel.

I also condemn the disproportionate use of force by the Israel Defence Force which resulted in more than 2000 deaths in Gaza.

Let the loss of life not have been in vain and let the future of Palestinian children be a future without foreign occupation.

A two-state solution, with comprehensive support from neighboring countries and robust international peacekeeping arrangements, should be the objective.

To the Palestinians I say, reconcile. Be your own best friends so you can build a free and sovereign Palestine ensuring fundamental rights and freedom for all.

To the Israelis I say, the current situation is unsustainable. Be brave, be wise and give peace a chance.

The occupation of Palestine must end.

Madam/Mr. President

The violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity breaches the UN Charter, international law and numerous treaties.

The illegal annexation of Crimea threatens security and stability throughout Europe.

The credibility of the Security Council is seriously undermined when a Permanent Member violates the Charter by using force to change borders, and then can veto the necessary response and actions by the body empowered to maintain international peace and security.

Madame/Mr. President

The Council is also undermined when it proves incapable of defending civilians that are subject to foreign occupation or is unable to prevent the use of chemical weapons.

The United Nations were founded to ensure that never again should the fate of nations be decided at the barrel of a gun.

Recent events have shown that we must reaffirm our commitment to the UN Charter and other legal instruments to safeguard the foundations of a just and peaceful world.

This holds particularly true for the UN Security Council. In its role of maintaining international peace and security its compass should be the UN Charter and international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. It should apply the law equally to all parties.

The Council needs to become more solution oriented and directly engaged. Its working methods must be improved, especially the application of the veto. Iceland supports the recent French and Mexican led proposal for framing the veto in cases of mass atrocities.

The Council should also make use of its referral power as intended by the Rome Statute.

Post 2015 agenda

Madam/Mr. President

In a world riven with inequality, poverty and conflict, it is a challenge to chart a path towards the future we want.

Since the last General Debate we have made real progress in preparing for the decisions to be taken next year on a new framework for sustainable development.

The year ahead will be a test of our resolve to deliver.

Iceland will participate constructively in the negotiations for the post 2015 agenda as well as for a new regime to address climate change.

Allow me to highlight a few issues which I believe are fundamental.

Food security - Oceans

With an increasing world population, measures to ensure food security are more important than ever.

For three billion people, seafood provides about 20 per cent of their intake of animal protein.

9 to 12 per cent of the global population depends on the seafood sector for their livelihood.

Yet we have a paradox. Overfishing remains a widespread problem. But at the same time fisheries are greatly underperforming. With improved infrastructure and better management, the economic benefits from marine fisheries could be increased by 50 billion dollars per year, or more than half the value of the global seafood trade.

It is clear that ocean issues are one of the keys to the Post-2015 development agenda.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea provides a sound legal basis for states to harness their marine resources.

Iceland remains firmly loyal to the Convention and we build our marine policy on scientific research where sustainability guides all our decisions.

The Convention on the Law of the Sea has been instrumental for Iceland's success. In a broader context it is a valuable tool for development efforts. Yet what is often lacking is the capacity of states to implement effective monitoring and sustainable harvesting.

Iceland has been sharing know-how through the United Nations University Fisheries Training Program in Iceland, where over 1500 experts have benefitted from post-graduate studies and workshops in the field.

Desertification, Land Degradation and Draught (DLDD)

Madam/Mr. President

The second key area for assuring food security is land. Every decade, 120 million hectares of land, an area the size of South Africa, are lost to desertification and drought.

Climate change is contributing to an ever faster rate of land degradation, which in turn releases greenhouse gases, creating a vicious circle. Switching to sustainable land management (SLM) is therefore not only crucial to food and water security, but an important factor in mitigating and adapting to climate change.

This is why Iceland argues strongly for measures to achieve a land-degradation neutral world.

Iceland contributes actively to these efforts through the Group of Friends in New York and through the United Nations University Land Restoration Training Program in Iceland.

Energy

Madam/Mr. President

A third key area is to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. No society can develop without energy. Yet, today over 1.3 billion people have no access to electricity.

As energy production grows it is essential to increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix by 2030.

Iceland contributes to this effort.

We have lined up with a group of countries and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) to identify opportunities and support mechanisms to scale-up geothermal production.

We invite Member States to join this Global Geothermal Alliance.

Iceland has also been working with the World Bank on projects in the Great African Rift Valley and we have run the Geothermal Training Program of the UNU in Iceland for 35 years.

Gender equality and women's empowerment

Madam/Mr. President

In Iceland and the other Nordic Countries the revolution in women's education and the high level of female participation in the labor market have been the basis of welfare and economic prosperity.

Without the full and equal participation of women in all spheres of society, including in decision-making it will be impossible to make real and lasting progress in addressing sustainable development challenges.

The stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment agreed in the Open Working Group must be maintained.

But we should not stop there. Gender equality must be further mainstreamed throughout the new framework. Here, I cannot leave out the centrality of ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Beijing+20

Madam/Mr. President

We must continue to fight for the full implementation of the commitments we made almost 20 years ago in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Iceland is proud to support UN Women in the campaign to celebrate Beijing+20. We have partnered with Suriname to lead a friends' group of countries to galvanize support to promote gender equality and to commemorate the 20th anniversary.

We call on Member States to join this effort and take concrete actions on the 12 themes of the Platform for Action.

For our part, we want to bring men and boys to the table on gender equality in a positive way.

Iceland and Suriname will convene a "Barbershop" conference in January 2015 where men will discuss gender equality with other men, with a special focus on addressing violence against women. This will be a unique conference as it will be the first time at the United Nations that we bring together only men leaders to discuss gender equality. It will be an exceptional contribution to the Beijing+20 and #HeforShe campaigns.

Madam/Mr. President

We have been reminded in recent weeks of the fragility of human beings and the need for us to work together on the biggest threats to mankind.

Let me express our sympathy and solidarity with those states suffering from the Ebola outbreak. The Government of Iceland will join in the international effort to curb this outbreak with financial contributions to UN agencies.

Madam/Mr. President

Next year, the Member States of the United Nations will come together to make important decisions on how to address climate change and pursue sustainable development.

In the north, Arctic biodiversity and ecosystems are threatened by climate change, and sustainable harvesting of natural resources is vital.

I pledge Iceland's commitment to work for bold decisions on the future of our planet and increased prosperity of the world community in the year 2015.

May the wise words of Nelson Mandela come true as we navigate this path:

"It always seems impossible until it's done."

Thank you Mr./Madam President.