



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

**Statement by  
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*During the General Debate of  
the 67<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly*

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**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

First, I would like to congratulate His Excellency Vuk Jeremić on his election as President of the 67<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. He can be assured that the Icelandic delegation will assist him in every way possible.

Mr. President,

Last year I brought you the message that my Government would propose to our Parliament that Iceland recognizes Palestine as a sovereign and an independent state. I'm happy to tell you today, that we have fulfilled that promise. What's more, not a single member of the Icelandic Parliament voted against the recognition of Palestine.

Mr. President,

The United Nations have recently estimated that Gaza will no longer be "livable" by 2020 unless urgent action is taken to improve water supply, power, health and basic education. The deplorable living conditions described in the UN report demonstrate only too well that the situation in Palestine is unacceptable to anyone who respects human dignity.

I have visited Gaza. I met with fishermen who are not allowed to go fishing in the waters out of Gaza. I met the children of Gaza whose lives are made impossible by poverty, violence and a blockade that by others than myself has been described as an open door prison.

I have seen for myself how the human rights of the people of the West bank are violated every day by a man-made barrier cutting through their roads, their lands, their lives.

When I was in Qalqilya the words of a former statesman we all know rung in my head. Mr. Netanyahu – tear down this wall!

I also know that the Israeli people are just like the rest of us. They just want to live in peace, and so they deserve. The best way to ensure that, is a two state solution, that would not only be to the benefit of the Palestinians, but to the Israeli people as well.

Mr. President,

I listened to Mr. Netanyahu's speech on Thursday, and I have a comment to make on behalf of the Icelandic people: Don't bomb Iran. Don't start another war in the Middle East. At the same time I say to President Ahmadinejad and the Iranian leadership: Don't build a bomb. Let diplomacy work, not rabbleroxing or fearmongering. Let's work for peace together.

Mr. President,

We have seen fundamental changes break forth with the Arab spring as demonstrated by democratic elections. Democracy matures and only gets better with time, and the Arab spring is just beginning. In a democracy everyone has a place and a role. As friends

and supporters we urge all of us to ensure the Arab spring will advance the rights of all people, towards societies of democracy and social justice, where our sisters in the Arab world are allowed to thrive in the same way as our brothers – and women and men enjoy equal rights.

Sadly, there is no spring in Syria. Thousands of innocent people, not least innocent children, are loosing their lives due to an oppressive regime. The international community must unite to end the violence and we must make a better effort to seek a political and peaceful solution for the sake of the Syrian people. We must also ensure that those, on both sides, who commit atrocities, will at the end of the day face their responsibility in an international court of law.

The Syrian problem is also a wake-up call for the UN with regard to the Security Council. Syria has demonstrated how arcane the Council is, and how out-of-tune it is with the needs of the modern world. The truth is that the Security Council has become an obstacle to international efforts to address and solve situations such as in Syria. We must reform it, so as to make it a tool, not a hindrance, for progress in situations such as in Syria this year, or – as we saw last year – concerning the Palestinian application.

Let me add, that we always must oppose violence, and terrorism, and we all should unite in condemning the ghastly murder of the American Ambassador in Libya recently. Our embassies, our tools to work for the people, for peace, must always be inviolable.

Mr. President,

Iceland is an open and embracing society, and our foreign policy is based on human rights – for everyone. From the point of view of human rights it is not acceptable that anyone is persecuted or mistreated because of her or his sexual orientation or gender identity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees equal treatment and non-discrimination to all people, and we, the community of nations, must ensure that equal treatment in every sense of the word extends as well to sexual orientation and gender identity. Let's not forget that we all, every human, are sparks from the same sun.

Mr. President,

Small countries can be global pioneers. Iceland demonstrated that by breaking the ice of recognition for the Baltic countries, by introducing geothermal as an alternative in the world's quest for clean power, and we have led by example in the fight for gender equality.

I'm happy to tell you that Iceland is now embarking on a pioneering programme regarding clean renewable energy for up to 150 million Africans. We have ensured funds to work with the World Bank to assist 13 countries of the East African Rift Valley to identify, research and prepare their considerable geothermal resources for utilization. This will be the greatest and most historic project Iceland ever has cooperated on with the developing countries, and I'm very proud of it.

Mr. President,

It may sound as a paradox but when we put our expertise in geothermal energy to use in East-Africa we are at the same time protecting the environment of our neighbourhood, the Arctic. The ice of the Arctic is melting at a pace far greater than ever anticipated. You don't need to be a prophet to predict that in the Arctic vast areas will open – sooner than later – for new transport routes between continents and for production of oil and gas. Of course, this may bring immense commercial benefits to the people living in, and around, the Arctic. But we are also acutely aware of the dangers to the fragile Arctic ecosystem and to the traditional livelihood of the Arctic people. We have to tread very carefully in the Arctic. It is in the interest of all nations to ensure the Arctic Council becomes strong enough to provide in future the forum for shaping important decisions on common interests of all the Arctic peoples.

Mr. President,

Times have been tough in Iceland. In the recession in Europe we were the first country down, but we were also the first country up. If there is any lesson to be drawn from the Icelandic recovery it is that austerity doesn't work on its own. Iceland certainly went through her share of austerity, but we also raised taxes, especially on the wealthy, and used the revenue to stimulate growth and ensure the welfare system was intact. Today, we have some of the lowest unemployment in Europe, and robust economic growth. The Icelandic model works.

Perhaps the best sign that Iceland is back in business is the fact that whilst the global recession has sadly led to a decline in international support for the developing countries Iceland is bucking that trend. We are increasing ours – substantially.

And finally, Mr. President, the first letters of the themes I have broached here today – Palestine, Energy, the Arctic, Climate Change and the Economy, form the word we should all hold dearest here in this hall and towards each other, whatever our differences – P-E-A-C-E, Peace.