



Permanent Mission of Iceland
to the United Nations

Statement by Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland
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Madam/Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

[I would like to start by congratulating Mr. Csaba Kőrösi on his election as the president of the 77th session of the General Assembly.]

I would also like to thank the Secretary General, Mr. Antonio Guterres for his leadership, as well as those whose daily work is dedicated to the ideals of the United Nations.

Mr/Madam President.

We meet in critical times.

This hall, the venue for so many historic events, is in and of itself a testament to some of the ideas that this organization, one of the most important in world history, is built on.

In this hall, during this session, we are equal.

Whether we represent a global superpower or one of the more than 70 member states, like mine, that have less than one million inhabitants - in this room we all have the

same number of seats at the table, we each have a vote and we all have a voice and the right to let it be heard from this podium.

And at the hand of the president of the General Assembly, there is a gavel - a simple wooden hammer, an instrument so light and non-threatening that it could hardly be of any use as a weapon to hurt. Nevertheless, the person who holds it can take control of the deliberations of the most powerful men and women in the world. The striking of this small hammer against a simple block of wood compels respect for the rules that the members of these United Nations have agreed to abide by in this chamber.

It is a symbol of order.

And it is therefore fitting that the inscription on the gavel says „Með lögum skal land byggja“- it is in Icelandic, as the gavel is an article that Iceland donated to this great organization. It means that society shall be built on the pillars of law - it is a quote from an ancient Icelandic text of law - and the next line elaborates with the statement that the land will indeed be desolated if lawlessness or unjust law are allowed to take hold. In the global context, we are all acutely aware, not least the smaller states of this world, that a world not governed by rules, will be a world dominated by force.

Mr/Madam President.

We meet at a time when a powerful country, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, has decided to challenge the norms and international laws that have served the world so well since world leaders, with the horrors of two world wars vivid in their memory, decided "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, and the untold sorrow that it brings to mankind."

The post-world war order has not prevented problems and conflicts from arising. Mistakes, and questionable decisions have been made. The sorrows and horrors of war and conflict have indeed been a part of too many lives in too many parts of the world. But, by and large, wars of territorial expansion have simply not been allowed.

In my part of the world, my generation does not hold memories of the horrors of a global war. We have grown up believing that peace among nations can almost be taken for granted.

It cannot.

However, the global system has provided an answer to the critical questions of **how** problems are solved.

This construct is now under threat.

It is our duty as leaders, not least those of us who are young, to make sure that the fortunes of the past decades do not lead us into dangerous complacency. We must advocate for the multilateral system at every opportunity and convince the peoples of the world, that despite its flaws, it is vastly and completely superior to any other method of resolving issues and disputes between states.

Of course, we must continue to reform our organization and make it more fit for purpose and more representative to meet growing and more complicated new challenges. Iceland fully supports the vision of the Secretary General put forward in Our Common Agenda, on how we can revitalize our work and strengthen the multilateral system so it can best serve future generations.

Mr/Madam President.

The unlawful and brutal full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine came as a shock, a rude awakening to how the world might look if the ability to destroy, rather than the capacity to create, is allowed to determine the fate of nations. The absolute and sickening brutality that Russia has shown, as evidenced in newly liberated areas, is beyond comprehension. It represents an absolute breakdown of civilization.

Therefore, before I will say anything else about world affairs. I will say that for the sake of humanity, Ukraine must win. Russia's aggression must be defeated, and the crimes perpetrated in its name must be accounted for and punished. The irresponsible words of Russia's president these past few days are a chilling reminder that giving in to bullies and rule-breakers will only encourage more bullying and further rule-breaking.

For the sake of humanity, this madness must stop.

Mr/Madam President.

The number of people who are faced with **food insecurity, poverty and hunger** is increasing at a terrifying rate due to the lingering effects of the pandemic and the pandemic response, armed conflict, and climate change. Those facing acute food insecurity have soared to 345 million this year with no end in sight.

Natural catastrophies that are linked to climate change are becoming more relentless and severe, as evidenced for example by the recent flooding in Pakistan and the droughts in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel

Iceland has been, and will continue to, increase its funding for humanitarian assistance, working primarily with UN entities. Iceland is committed to shoulder its

responsibility, as demonstrated by our increase in humanitarian and development assistance.

We face a **climate crisis** that will not go away on its own. It is paramount that all countries step up every effort to accelerate our fight towards better climate resilience. Iceland is committed to doing its part and has set ambitious targets of achieving carbon neutrality and full energy conversion no later than 2040. We increased our contribution to climate finance with a strong focus on balanced approaches to mitigation and adaptation and are committed to do more.

There is a **crisis in public health** in many countries, the Covid-19 pandemic showed how fragile the healthcare systems really are when tested. This is a problem that will not go away on its own as the demographic realities of many countries paint a serious picture. In many places there is also a crisis of mental health.

The pandemic exposed many faults in the way we tackle global crises and we will be dealing with the consequences for a long time. While rich countries were able to vaccinate their entire populations that protection was denied those most vulnerable in the poorer regions in the world. Meanwhile, it will be a matter for future historians to judge if the economic sacrifices made during the pandemic were the worth the benefits, or if the widespread curtailment of individual liberties that we saw, with increased social isolation, were the wisest response to the crisis.

Mr/Madam President.

It was said in an English poem published 498 years ago that no man is an island. Indeed. But not only is no man an island, no country is an island. Not even the countries, like Iceland, that actually are islands.

The decisions made in one part of the world can have great consequences, intended or unintended, across the globe. Of course, this applies in particular to the oceans that cover 70% of our planets surface and whose waters do not respect any national boundaries.

For Iceland, sustainable fisheries and a dynamic blue economy are critical. It is our responsibility to ensure sustainable use and health of our oceans for the benefit of all. Tackling marine pollution is a priority, in particular plastic waste, and we welcome the important steps taken in Nairobi earlier this year.

Allow me also to highlight the renewed spirit that the Lisbon Ocean Conference brought us, including increased recognition of the importance of food from the ocean in our food systems and for achieving Agenda 2030.

For 40 years, our Constitution of the Ocean, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, has served as a solid foundation for international cooperation on everything related to the oceans. It is a prime example of a diplomatic success that has stood the test of time and continues to serve us well.

With new environmental challenges, along with increased awareness and scientific knowledge of the importance and vulnerability of the ocean, the time is ripe to conclude negotiations on a new agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. Iceland welcomes the progress made during the negotiations last month and is determined to do its part to reach an agreement.

The role of UN and its institutions in these crises is therefore of utmost importance. While the current and impending crises we are facing must be dealt with, we must

not neglect the Sustainable Development Goals. The year 2030 is fast approaching and yet we are nowhere near the realization of Agenda 2030.

Iceland aims to shoulder its responsibility, as demonstrated by the increase in Official Development Assistance.

We must also not give up on our aim of a world free of nuclear weapons. The failure to reach a consensus on advancing the implementation of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty only a month ago, in this very hall, is a further testament to the irresponsible behavior of the Russian Federation- a lone opponent of the final document and the only state that has lowered the threshold for using nuclear weapons by explicitly threatening to resort to these weapons of mass destruction.

Mr/Madam President.

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." The world cannot afford to deny anyone the opportunity to contribute to the solutions that we collectively need.

Too widely, we are witnessing an increase in repression of religious and ethnic minorities, racism, anti-semitism and violent nationalism. Autocratic tendencies and voices that seek to intensify political polarization are on the rise.

Iceland is remains committed to countering the regression we have witnessed in the rights of women and girls in too many places around the world. The rights of LGBTI people across the world have either never been secured or have regressed.

The values and principles embodied in the UN Charter, international law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are not only important in and of themselves

- they are absolutely critical if we are to harness the individual creativity, entrepreneurial spirit and innovative mindset that we need to rely on in our quest for man-made solutions to our man-made problems.

These ideals are another example of how the method of solving problems is a more pressing matter to resolve than any individual problem. And we know that the answer to humanity's challenges lies in the human spirit itself, if it is allowed to live out its truest potential.

Mr/Madam President.

The job of leaders is not easy when the times require sacrifices.

We are all aware of the challenges that open societies face. Freedom of expression means that it is possible to spread lies and false information. This is a real problem that we need to address.

Free societies need to become more resilient with a strong, well-educated, and well-informed public being the first and best line of defense against those who seek to manipulate with lies, conspiracy theories and hate mongering.

However, when we worry about the misuse of the freedom of expression in open societies, let us not forget that the truly terrifying misuse of information is when governments claim a monopoly on truth. Relentless propaganda and brain washing by official sources in corrupt governments with evil intentions can lead to a truly terrifying result. This is what we have seen in Russia where all form of public debate and independent thinking has been criminalised.

A society where people hesitate to criticize - or even ridicule - authority, the official truth or the established narrative - is not truly free.

For the peoples of the world to be able to find the transformative solutions that the world so desperately needs, people must be able to challenge the status quo. They must be free to express their opinions and debate freely on even the most sensitive issues. They must also be free to create art, even if the art is distasteful.

These are the values that the defenders of Ukraine want to secure for their children.

These are the values that Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is demanding for the people of Belarus.

These values are being denied to Afghan women and girls under the Taliban regime.

These are the values that do not accept that Mahsa Amini is beaten to death in Iran for wearing a hijab incorrectly.

And - let us not forget - that the Russian government is not only guilty of horrific abuses on the international scene. Brave Russians resistors to Putin's system, or the thousands that showed up on the streets of Russia earlier this week - are all subject to harsh punishments, wrongful imprisonment, persecution and often worse.

The almost 500-year-old little poem by John Donne I quoted before includes another famous line. As it discusses how interconnected the world was in 1524 - it says "And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls" - meaning that we should view it as our duty to respond to common challenges, and not look the other way or wait for others to act. We must answer the call.

Even if the challenges we face were not created by the younger generations, and they were not created by the poor of the world. Nevertheless, all of humanity will have to take part in solving them.

So - whether we like it or not - whether we deserve or not - it falls to the leaders of today and tomorrow to face our common reality. And, whether we like it or not - and whether we deserve it or not - this we must do together.

We must all answer the call.

We must answer the call to stand with Ukraine.

We must answer the call to defend the multilateral system.

It is also us, who must answer the call to defend our nature and fight back against climate change and fight poverty and deprivation.

And finally, we must answer the call to defend the rights of individuals and give them the opportunity to contribute to the solutions that are so desperately needed.

If we do not, we have failed.

Mr/Madam President.

I am thankful for the opportunity to address this 77th General Assembly and once again be reminded that the possibility for nations to come together, and exchange ideas and opinions in a civilised manner remains the norm in international relations, and that those who break the rules are almost universally condemned.

The noble aim of this organization, to spare the world from the sorrows of war, is maybe more relevant than ever before. Order in the world must be restored.

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Thank you.