



27. september 2025 / Utanríkisráðuneytið

Ávarp utanríkisráðherra á 80. allsherjarþingi Sameinuðu þjóðanna

Madam President, Excellencies,

At the heart of the UN Charter lies a simple but powerful principle: *the dignity and worth of the human person*. It is a reminder that international cooperation is not about institutions for their own sake, but about people – ordinary people whose lives are freer, safer and more prosperous when nations choose cooperation over confrontation, dignity over domination, rules over force.

This vision, born in San Francisco eighty years ago, must remain our compass. Without it, our world would be less free, less just, and far less secure. For Iceland – a small state whose independence and prosperity depend on the respect for international law – the rules-based order has been nothing short of essential.

Sadly, these very foundations are under siege. Fundamental principles of self-determination and equal rights for all nations are increasingly being undermined, and even deliberately abandoned.

We see paralysis in the Security Council, contempt for international law, and a disturbing rise in isolationism and big-power politics.

This, in turn, contributes to a decline in the public's trust in a system that has brought us so much in the past eighty years.

This erosion of the rules-based international order is deeply dangerous. A world not governed by rules, will be a world where the strong impose their will, and the weaker pay the price.

This may appeal to those who possess such power. There are clear indications that it does. But that is a world we cannot, and should not, accept.

President,

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is not only a blatant violation of the UN Charter – it is a direct assault on this Organization itself. And the fact that the aggressor sits on the Security Council, entrusted with upholding peace, is nothing short of obscene.

Ukraine is not only bravely fighting for its independence and survival, but also defending the very values that the United Nations was founded upon: sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the right of all nations to live in peace and freedom.

Unfortunately, despite Ukraine's clear willingness and committed efforts by the United States and Europe, the path to peace has not advanced. As the past few weeks have shown, Russia does not want peace. Instead, the Kremlin accelerates brutal attacks on civilians and critical infrastructure in Ukraine. Meanwhile, Russia's provocations over Estonia, Poland and Romania should be of concern to all nations.

Let us be clear: Russia has no intention of ending this war. It escalates, it terrorises, it tears children from their homes. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian children have been abducted – a heinous crime, an attack on Ukraine's very future. If the dignity and worth of the human person mean anything, it is that these children are returned immediately.

To the people of Ukraine I say: Iceland stands with you – not only out of solidarity, but because you are on the frontlines defending a rules-based order where law prevails over brute force. You must have a just and lasting peace.

Colleagues,

We must speak with equal clarity about Gaza. We are witnessing crimes against humanity and war crimes in broad daylight, what appears before us is systematic ethnic cleansing.

This needs to end. We need an immediate ceasefire, full humanitarian access, and the unconditional release of all hostages. We need peace for all the innocent people.

Iceland unequivocally condemned Hamas' gruesome terrorist attack on Israel on October 7th. There is no justification for such brutality, nor for the taking of hostages.

But nothing – and I mean nothing – can justify the collective punishment of millions of Palestinians. Starvation, bombardment, forced displacement: these acts are cruel, inhumane and illegal. There are children dying everyday in Palestine. For the past two years at least one child has been killed every hour in Gaza. Every. Single. Hour.

Iceland recognized Israel in 1948 and Palestine in 2011. Our position remains clear: both peoples have equal rights to self-determination. Lasting peace depends on it.

A Two-State Solution - where Israelis and Palestinians live side by side in peace and mutual recognition - remains the only viable path to peace – even if many doubt its feasibility today. If we abandon it, we abandon hope itself.

Extremists and spoilers on both sides have long stood in the way of peace. Hamas has no place in the future of Palestine. And when Israeli officials call for annexation or the expulsion of Palestinians, they are not defending Israel's security – they are calling for violations of international law. And we will call it what it is: hateful, illegal, and a direct obstacle to peace.

President,

Russia's aggression in Ukraine, Israeli's military operations in Gaza, as well as the horrific war in Sudan, are the starkest demonstrations of a deeply troubling global trend: growing disregard for international law and multilateral commitments.

We are seeing this when it comes to international courts. The opinions of the International Court of Justice have been ignored, and the International Criminal Court has been defied and targeted with punitive measures.

At a time when more accountability is most needed, the very institutions that were set up to exert that accountability are being actively eroded. It pains me to see friends partake in this.

This is especially alarming for small states, like my own, whose very existence depends on a functioning system of international law and commitments. When the powerful abandon the rules, all nations are at risk.

The same applies to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, with troubling erosion of longstanding commitments and the weaponization of emerging disruptive technologies.

We must also recognize new challenges: global corporations that transcend borders, shaping economies, technology and daily life without sufficient accountability. This is a reality without precedent – and one that demands international responses.

I implore all of you, not least those representing major powers, to think about this. To ponder what kind of world we actually want to live in. I, for one, know my mind in this respect.

Madam President,

Human rights are not optional. They are universal, indivisible, and fundamental to peace and prosperity.

It is a matter of pride for us that Iceland is seen as a global trailblazer in terms of gender equality. Fifty years ago, next month, the women of Iceland set out to strike against the systematic inequality in the so-called Women's Strike. This set us on a path. No country is perfect however, and none has achieved full equality.

My government, which is led by three women for the first time, is committed to pushing this progress further.

And on that topic: Iceland expects nothing less than to see the United Nations finally led by a woman when the next Secretary-General takes office.

Colleagues.

I must speak plainly. Those who rely on democracy, human rights and free trade are under pressure. Populist movements are gaining ground. And we see how disinformation and conspiracy theories spread online, corroding trust in facts, in institutions, in one another.

The result is predictable: rising intolerance, especially towards marginalized groups – women, LGBTQI+ persons, minorities. People whose only “crime” is being who they are.

Let us be clear: Women are not the problem. LGBTQI+ people are not the problem. Minorities are not the problem. The problem lies with those who spread fear and division.

This trend is deeply dangerous for democracy. And it is why Iceland, as a member of the Human Rights Council, will continue to speak loudly and clearly: equality is not negotiable. Human dignity cannot be bartered away.

Freedom of expression is the cornerstone of democracy. It is also the foundation of innovation, culture and progress. But freedom comes with responsibility.

To distort free speech into the mass production of lies, propaganda or AI-driven disinformation is not the exercise of freedom – it is its betrayal. Twisting facts into fake news, science into lies and upending reality is an attack on truth itself. Iceland will continue to defend freedom of expression, but also to insist that it be used responsibly, not as a weapon to harm or divide.

President,

As global needs are at an all-time high, we are seeing large-scale reductions in development budgets by several major donors with profound consequences for the poorest countries and the most vulnerable. Iceland will not follow that path.

Ultimately, development cooperation is an investment in our common rights and freedom, bringing us towards a more stable, just, and peaceful world.

The climate crisis – that we are certainly facing – knows no borders. In the high north, where Iceland lies, temperatures are rising more than twice the global average. Glaciers retreat, permafrost thaws, oceans warm. And it is the poorest – those least responsible – who suffer the most.

For us Icelanders, renewable energy is the backbone of our security and independence. And the ocean: the ocean is our lifeblood – our history, our livelihood, our identity. Its health is inseparable from the fight against climate change and from the protection of biodiversity. “The Ocean gives, but it also takes”.

That shared understanding deepens our solidarity with Small Island Developing States and others, who are on the front lines of sea-level rise. Their reality must be faced by the entire UN membership, together, as a global family.

Colleagues,

The United Nations is not only about states and structures – it is about people. The people who work tirelessly for this Organization, often under immense pressure and even risking their lives, to uphold its ideals. To them, Iceland extends its deepest gratitude. Your dedication reminds us that the United Nations – imperfect as it is – still has a beating heart.

But it is also about us – the leaders gathered here. These are serious times. That demand serious leaders. We cannot afford cynicism, short-termism, or the comfort of slogans. We must act with love for our people, with respect for our neighbours, and with wisdom for future generations. This is not naive. It is the essence of responsible leadership. And it is what the world needs from us.

President,

Undermining the very institutions that have advanced peace, prosperity and human rights over the past eighty years will only deepen the challenges we face.

At this critical moment, it is crucial we reverse course, so that we can pass on to future generations, what we may have, at times, taken for granted. The world needs the United Nations, and we have to be the strongest we can be.

Yes, we face daunting challenges. But our story as a global community is not only one of crises. It is also one of progress. Apartheid was abolished. Extreme poverty was cut in half. Treaties were created to protect our seas and our skies. These achievements remind us of what is possible when we act together.

For Iceland, the choice is clear. We will always stand for equality, for respect for international law, and for peace. Even when the tide turns against us, even when others wish these values silenced. We will not be silenced. We will keep these values alive. Because they are the essence of the United Nations, and they are grounded in *the dignity and worth of the human person*.

Let us revive the ideals that inspired the founders in San Francisco eighty years ago and draw on that same spirit today. Not for their sake, but for our children's sake.

They deserve a world where peace, justice, dignity and freedom are not just words on paper, but lived realities. That is the legacy we must leave them.

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