



The Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations

Statement by
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Permanent Representative of Iceland
to the United Nations'

at the

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This session of ECOSOC is important because it is important that we make the first Development Cooperation Forum a success. The timing of the themes makes it especially important. Our efforts for sustainable development will require new initiatives, especially in the areas of food and increased energy costs. The session is important because we are halfway towards the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals. It is therefore a good time for the Development Cooperation Forum to take stock of the challenges ahead.

Last year's Annual Ministerial Review emphasized the important role of the United Nations in making progress in implementing the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. The AMR is a valuable contribution to ECOSOC's work. I welcome the voluntary national presentations that are being made and thank the respective Governments for their contributions to the AMR.

High food prices are a matter of extreme anxiety in many countries. In times of crisis, it is women, in particular, who bear the brunt of the impact of the price increases on their families. In the long term we must look for sustainable solutions. Our present food production and distribution systems are creaking under a massive increase in demand and added stresses from climate change. We must look for solutions which are sustainable - quick fixes are not an option.

Increased productivity in food production is crucial. Markets alone will not solve the problem. We start at the initial stage of analyzing the problem. The UN's role is important and we are convening the Secretary General's Initiative and Leaders' Forum.

Iceland is ready to do its part. The World Food Programme plays a crucial role in addressing responses to food emergencies. The Government of Iceland responds to the emergency needs and will continue to monitor the situation.

Gender equality and the role of women in crises. The Icelandic International Development Agency (ICEDIA) has cooperated with local partners in promoting equal rights and active participation of women in the economy, thus strengthening local food security. We have also been increasing our support for the work of UNIFEM.

Vital to sustainable agriculture is the fight against land degradation and desertification, made worse by climate change. Iceland has over 100 years of experience in reclaiming land from erosion. We have been helping other countries to learn from our experience. We are also helping to develop a UN University programme on soil technology.

I would like to mention briefly the importance of sustainable fisheries. Ninety-five per cent of those who live from fisheries are in the developing world and a billion people depend on fisheries for their main source of protein. With increasing demand for fish, it becomes more important that we work to make sure that fish stocks are managed in a sustainable manner.

The UN University Fisheries Training Programme in Iceland reflects our emphasis on the importance of providing training and sharing technology of sustainable fisheries, which can provide increased food supply for some of the poorest. The Icelandic International Development Agency (ICEDIA) has been conducting training projects in the field of fisheries in southern Africa, Asia, and Central America.

Climate change and high energy prices are challenges that also call for urgent action. Many of the poorest developing countries, including Small Island Developing States, are the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change and less able to get through the financial turmoil created by higher energy prices. Transitioning to sustainable energy systems is urgent.

Iceland can serve as an example of how to battle increased oil prices and climate change. We have transformed Iceland from being the world's largest per capita fuel user into a world leader as regards the production and consumption of clean energy. Now 100% of our electricity is produced from clean energy sources, and 70% of our total energy needs, including fuel for cars and shipping, are met by hydro or geothermal power.

We believe that if Iceland could do this, so can others. Our experience shows that the technology and human resources can benefit other nations. In particular geothermal energy can play an important role in this aspect in many parts of the world. Contrary to what many people believe, geothermal energy is accessible in a great many countries, many of them developing countries. It is not a matter of whether geothermal energy is the solution but it can be hard to adopt new technology if it is not a matter of transfer of technology is therefore crucial.

For almost 30 years the Icelandic government has operated and funded the United Nations University Geothermal Training Programme, training hundreds of geothermal professionals from many countries. These professionals have later become geothermal engineers and geothermal experts in their home countries. This is one kind of technological transfer that we believe is particularly important to be expanded in the years to come.

The potential for hydro power is also vast. Africa, for example, is at the moment only using 5% of its potential hydro power. Iceland will be hosting in June 2009 an international conference on sustainable hydro-power. I sincerely hope that many participants from developing countries will be able to attend.

In conclusion, Mr. President, we face a challenge and what is required for the solution is political will and more effective international cooperation both with respect to technology transfer and to financing for development.