



UMHVERFISRÁÐUNEYTIÐ

Svandís Svavarsdóttir, Minister for the Environment, Iceland:

Statement

at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
22 June 2012, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Madame President,

The future of Mother Earth the future and of mankind. It is no small task we have in front of us, and I would like to thank the Brazilian Presidency for opening their home as the venue for this important work.

We may disagree on the path, but we have a common vision on the destination: A future where society has embraced sustainable development as the only way to ensure that future generations will have better chances than their parents to lead a happy, healthy and long life.

Sustainable development is a call for justice and inclusion, it is a call for a better society. A society with equality between - generations and a world with equality between countries. It is a world where we have broader measures for our success than GDP, and where we no longer have a large proportion of the world population living in hunger and poverty.

Overall, we can be moderately pleased with the outcome of Rio+20. This is not the end of the road, but only one of the steps on our journey towards our ultimate goal of sustainable development.

Iceland succeeded in transcending from a small island developing state to a small island state in the 20th century – mainly by gaining control of its rich marine resources. The importance of the oceans cannot be overstated for a country like ours. The health of the ocean’s ecosystems and the sustainable management of its resources are of vital importance for Iceland.

But of course, the oceans are of vital importance to us all.

Let us not forget that the oceans cover 70% of the planet, and host a large part of the planet’s biodiversity. The oceans are essential sources of food. They play an important role in mitigating the impact of climate change. Ocean acidification is potentially one of the biggest environmental challenges we face today.

We need clean, healthy and productive oceans. We need a strong political commitment to the conservation of the marine environment and sustainable management of its resources.

Oceans do not recognize any boundaries, a fact which the framework for their protection must reflect.

Iceland welcomes the strong outcome on oceans in the final document.

The Secretary-General’s “Sustainable Energy for All” initiative is extremely important and it would have been preferable to see a stronger support for the initiative in the outcome document.

Iceland meets most of its energy needs from renewable energy resources. These resources are underdeveloped across the world, but this is a very important issue, when one fifth of the world’s population doesn’t have access to electricity.

I am pleased to inform you that a compact has been concluded between Iceland and the World Bank on geothermal development in Africa, with focus on the African Rift Valley.

Madame President,

As has been noted by many, there is no sustainable development without gender equality and women’s empowerment.

When looking at the document before us we have achieved certain progress, especially by committing ourselves to ensuring women's full and effective participation in sustainable development policies, programs and decision-making at all levels.

We are, however, surprised and dismayed that in the context of sustainable development our common vision does not include reproductive rights. We must remind ourselves, that these important rights have already been agreed upon by UN member states in other fora.

Let me also specifically mention the lack of language on gender and climate. We know that women and girls are the most affected, and that their access to decision making, not least on financial matters, has to be ensured.

We need to be vigilant and ensure that when implementing our commitments from Rio+20 we do indeed mainstream gender in accordance with our self-standing commitment to do so.

Madame President,

Words matter. They are the first step towards concrete action, they reflect our vision for the future. We must not tolerate backsliding on important women's rights, which are essential to achieving the goals of sustainable development.

Iceland regrets the position on reproductive rights in the outcome document, but reminds the conference of both the Cairo Programme of Action and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

We look forward to developing the Sustainable Development Goals, and there we must all acknowledge that women are part of the solution.

Thank you, Madame President.