



Permanent Mission of Iceland
to the United Nations

Written statement of Iceland for the general debate

2021 High-Level Political Forum

"Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development"

While the pandemic has underscored just how interconnected we all are, it has not been the great equalizer as some predicted. Those most vulnerable are hit the hardest. Those with no safety nets will take longer to recover from the socioeconomic effects of the pandemic. Persistent inequalities between and within countries have prolonged and exacerbated the effects of the pandemic.

The task of integrating the 2030 Agenda into the day to day governance is an ongoing task. Although the focus is shifting towards a more sustainable environment, economy, and societal factors, “nudging” a whole government system, even in a country with few inhabitants, takes time. We are nevertheless conscious of the two main causal factors when it comes to changing societies through just transition. And since we are certain where we are going those factors are time and consistency.

The government has evaluated where we stand in light of all the 169 SDG’s objectives, integrated the objectives into our central financial budget proposal in order to achieve greater synergy and maintained public awareness on the task of implementing the SDG’s at large.

Vaccines

In facing a global pandemic, we cannot exclude and neglect certain groups of people when it comes to vaccinations. Every country must do their share in correcting the imbalance in access to COVID-19 vaccines, tests and treatments. Adequate funding for the ACT-Accelerator is key to the continued global efforts in bringing the global pandemic to an end. Iceland is a committed partner of the ACT-Accelerator and its COVAX facility.

Sustainable recovery

Iceland and other countries are inching towards a post COVID era. Although it is too early to let our guard down, we must start laying the foundation for a more equal, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable post-pandemic environment. In that regard, the 2030 Agenda continues to

serve as a global blueprint for sustainable development and a plan of action for planet, people, prosperity, peace and partnership. Iceland reaffirms its commitment to fully implement the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

The pandemic demonstrated the importance of robust health-, welfare-, and insurance systems where access for all play a key role. Our policy throughout the pandemic was to follow scientific advice – first and foremost promoting life and health - guarding the income of families, providing companies with lifelines and sustaining the general economic and social situation to minimize possible loss. At the same time, we took proactive measures by increasing investment focusing on innovation and green investments.

Iceland is no stranger to the three interconnected pillars of sustainability: environment, society, and economy. Sustainability has, in fact, been the key to our prosperity. By respecting our nature and its resources and promoting gender equality and human rights we have seen rapid and relatively inclusive socioeconomic growth. Sustainable development is therefore a focus in our foreign policy and international development cooperation, including through addressing climate change, reducing gender inequalities, and securing human rights for all.

Human rights & gender equality

Human rights are essential to achieve sustainable development and must remain at the centre of the global pandemic response and recovery. The SDGs affirm the responsibility of all states to respect, protect and promote human rights, including gender equality. However, we all remain off-target to achieve SDG 5 on gender equality. We encourage other countries to join Iceland in its quest to achieve this target and improve gender equality, including ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and the fight against sexual and gender-based violence. Iceland is committed to contributing in a meaningful way as a co-leader of the Generation Equality Action Coalition on gender-based violence. We also encourage all countries to grant increased attention to groups who lack fundamental rights in many countries, such as LGBTI people and other vulnerable groups - leaving no one behind.

Climate

Climate action needs to be at the centre of our efforts as we build back better and greener after the pandemic. The Paris Agreement is the global baseline, and Iceland is fully committed to its implementation. To build back greener, we need to make full use of science, innovation, and positive financial stimulus for the full participation of the private sector. Iceland's climate action plan goes even further than was agreed in Paris.

Iceland announced in December at the Climate Ambition Summit its ambitions to enhance its level of 40% emissions cuts by 2030, to 55% or more compared to 1990 to be achieved collective with nearly 30 European countries.

Cutting emissions is not enough. To reach a net-zero future we must also remove carbon from the atmosphere. Iceland sees itself as a frontrunner in carbon removal. It is a key factor in our goal of reaching carbon neutrality before 2040.

Energy

At the heart of the fight against climate change is ensuring energy transition, the move to clean and sustainable energy for all. While Iceland's position in energy matters is unique, as the vast majority of the energy used in the country is renewable energy, we recognize that the world is still short of achieving affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. In this regard Iceland emphasizes renewable energy in its foreign policy and is fully committed to its role as a Global Energy Champion and looks forward to the UN High-level Dialogue on Energy.

DLDD

Iceland, as a co-chair of the UN Group of Friends on Desertification, Land degradation and Drought, was pleased to take part in the High-level dialogue on DLDD. The event underscored the global significance of DLDD issues for the entire SDG agenda. Since early last century Iceland has focused on recovering land quality and limiting land degradation. Degraded land is the root cause of many pressing societal challenges we are facing today, including the loss of animal habitat and the spread of disease from animals to humans. On a more positive note, land restoration offers multiple cross cutting solutions and is a connecting piece between enhanced food security, water, biodiversity, reduced climate emissions, more social stability and, ultimately, peace and security.

Food Systems Summit

The Food Systems Summit will be a key part of our global effort of ensuring a sustainable and inclusive pandemic recovery and the Decade of Action to achieve the SDGs. Iceland has advocated for a solutions summit and highlighted two game-changing areas. One is to implement comprehensive school food programmes in every country, which will benefit the diets and development of millions of children and bring co-benefits across the food system for livelihoods and environmental sustainability. Second is to further enhance the significant role that the ocean and blue foods play in the global food system.

SDGs

Although uneven and insufficient, the world is making progress toward the SDGs. We see inspiring improvements in areas such as maternal and child health, access to electricity and women's representation in government. So as we continue on this Decade of Action with emphasis on just transition, we must do all we can to protect the gains we have made and accelerate progress in areas lagging behind, through our renewed commitment to the 2030 Agenda.

Thank you.