

Address - Formal Opening Session of the High-Level Roundtable

Address by

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Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Iceland**

at the

**Formal Opening Session of the High-Level Roundtable on International
Cooperation for Sustainable Development in Caribbean Small Island
Developing States
25 March 2008**

Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Guests,

I want to thank our gracious co-hosts for this warm welcome and wonderful turnout. The Minister for Foreign Affairs is unfortunately unable to join us until tomorrow due to unforeseen circumstances. But I am honoured to speak in her stead on this important occasion.

Importance of small state cooperation

As a small island nation, Iceland has many features in common with Caribbean Small Island Developing States. Unfortunately for us Icelanders, who are just emerging from a long and difficult winter, this does not include climate. However, the characteristics we do share give us a solid foundation on which to expand our cooperation and sustain our partnership. These characteristics include small populations, limited resources, remoteness, susceptibility to natural disasters, vulnerability to external shocks, disproportional dependence on international trade, high transportation and communication costs and limited opportunity to create economies of scale.

These characteristics, or challenges, should nevertheless not discourage us from

pursuing our ambitions. The size of a country's territory or economy does not necessarily determine its contribution to the international community and the level of participation in international relations. Smallness is often but a state of mind. The right combination of confidence, conviction and realism yields the best results.

As a small island state, Iceland's road to development has faced various challenges common to all small island states, including a narrow resources base, limited capacity and a need for financial resources. I believe that we have an obligation to share our experience with countries facing similar challenges. The decision of the Government of Iceland to strengthen co-operation with Small Island Developing States is therefore in many ways based on Iceland's own journey.

Iceland's development policy and focus on Small Island Developing States

In line with internationally agreed commitments and obligations, Iceland's development co-operation efforts have increased in scope and volume in recent years. Our development policy places emphasis on education, health, gender equality and sustainable development, as reflected in the UN Millennium Development Goals.

Since establishing a special SIDS fund in 2005, Iceland has gradually been increasing contributions to development co-operation with SIDS. Increased focus on Small Island Developing States has led to the emergence of a new framework for co-operation called ***The Island Growth Initiative***. The framework reflects Iceland's commitment to effectiveness and will help to streamline all our co-operation efforts whether public or private: bilateral, multilateral or regional.

In fact, when opening an embassy in Managua, Nicaragua in 2005, Iceland

already took steps to increase development cooperation in the Caribbean region. Our bilateral agency, ICEIDA, is a key partner in this respect and is responsible for the implementation of development programmes in co-operation with relevant authorities in the region.

Opportunities for cooperation

Iceland's co-operation with SIDS will continue to be based on the priorities of our partners but also harnessing Iceland's comparative expertise and experience in key sectors such as geothermal energy, fisheries, and ocean governance, as well as gender equality and women's empowerment.

Geothermal Energy

Like many SIDS countries, Iceland is of volcanic origin. And while active volcanoes have sometimes made life difficult in Iceland, the harnessing of geothermal resources has brought great benefits. The use of geothermal energy for electricity generation now accounts for about 20% of the total in Iceland and has more than doubled in the last couple of years and now stands at about 450 MW. In fact, close to 100% of our electricity production now comes from clean renewable energy resources.

It is clear that Iceland's expertise in the use of renewable energy sources - such as geothermal energy - can be extremely useful in the Caribbean region, where many of our island partners are of volcanic origin and possess abundant geothermal resources that could significantly reduce their dependency on imported energy. Use of geothermal resources will have the added benefit of providing clean, renewable and sustainable alternatives to expensive and polluting carbon-based energy. In the past few years, Iceland has become one of the leading nations in this field of expertise; leadership which is dependent on

our technology and our businesses - many of which are represented today. We also share our experience in this field with international partners through the United Nations University Geothermal Training Programme.

Fisheries

We also see opportunities for increased cooperation in ocean governance and fisheries. As island states, prosperity is closely tied to our relationship with the sea. Fisheries has been the driving force of the modern economy in Iceland and the extension of our EEZ to 200 miles in 1976 was seen as a matter of survival, as by then we were realising that there were limits to how much we can fish. Since then annual catches have fluctuated, usually between 1.5 and 2 million tonnes annually, and we have emphasised management of the resources and increasing the value of the catch. Indeed, the resources of the sea continue to play a prominent role in our economy. As with geothermal energy, Iceland shares its experience in this field with international partners through the United Nations University Fisheries Training Programme.

Over the past ten years, a total of 30 fellows from 9 SIDS countries have graduated from the programme. Recent participation from the Caribbean region is a part of our preparation for a short course to be developed and delivered in the Caribbean region early next year. It is through this type of cooperation that relationships are forged, and I look forward to exploring with the many assembled guests ways to strengthen our cooperation in this field even further.

Gender Issues

Iceland's development co-operation places a special emphasis on gender issues and the special needs of women and children. Through increased allocations to key UN agencies, such as UNIFEM, UNFPA and UNICEF, our government is

committed to being among the donors with the highest per capita contributions to these agencies. We also work intensively with the World Bank on women's affairs and the integration of gender viewpoints.

It is a fact that women's empowerment and active participation in all levels of decision making has a multiplying effect and benefits society as a whole.

Closing

We feel that this dialogue will sow the seeds of a growing partnership between Iceland and the Caribbean SIDS. We have much in common, and much to gain by working together. And where could we possibly find a better place to accomplish these objectives than in these beautiful surroundings, in this friendly atmosphere, and in the true island spirit.

Thank you.