

# **Millennium Development Goals**

## **Special Event, September 25, 2013**

### **Speech of Mr. Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland**

Madam Chairperson, ministers, delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

- In the year 2000, world leaders gathered in this city and made a historic decision by adopting the Millennium Declaration.
- Since then, significant progress has been made in many areas on the road towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
- At the global level, hunger and poverty have been reduced significantly, primary school enrolment has increased and child mortality dropped.
- But in too many areas we have come up short, and progress has been disappointing.
- Development is uneven within and between countries, and we are faced with huge economic, social and environmental challenges. In short, a lot remains to be done.
- At the same time we are faced with a unique opportunity.
- In 2015 we will renew our commitments and adopt a new development agenda. An agenda that will build on achievements already made. An agenda that sets out to reach goals that haven't been reached, and addresses hazards that threaten future generations.

- The aim of the new framework should be to create a just and prosperous world where all people realize their rights and live with dignity and hope.
- It must holistically address poverty eradication, shared prosperity, respect for human rights and all three pillars of sustainable development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Iceland's development cooperation is concentrated on a limited number of partner countries and multilateral organisations.
- Our focus areas are social infrastructure, namely education and health; natural resources, that is fisheries and renewable energy; and peace building.
- Gender equality and environmental sustainability are crosscutting themes in all our work.
- Iceland finds it important to share its expertise and experience with other nations for the mutual benefit of progress and prosperity.
- The areas where our contributions add value are the harvesting of geothermal energy, sustainable fisheries, land restoration, and promotion of gender equality.
- Let me elaborate on the importance of those areas.
- It is a fact that more than one-fifth of the world's population lacks access to electricity, rising to almost 90% in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Increased access to renewable energy will improve living conditions for millions of people and open up new opportunities. Meeting these energy needs with clean and renewable energy resources will reduce the impact of climate change.

- Furthermore, ocean issues must be seriously addressed. However, when doing so, we do not need new governance structures, rather real commitment to implement the already agreed goals and targets.
- At the same time we must realize that fisheries is of particular importance to improve livelihoods in many developing countries.
- Utilizing the oceans in a sustainable manner is an important factor in realizing food security whereas one billion people in developing countries depend on fish for their primary protein.
- Moreover, we have a great challenge which is not receiving the attention it deserves globally.
- Loss of soil and decline in ecosystems is a silent crisis. The global community will be unable to achieve its goals of food and water security and meeting greenhouse gas emission targets without a major improvement in conservation and restoration of the world's soil resources.
- Last, but certainly not the least – gender equality and the empowerment of women should be put at the center of the new development agenda.
- Gender equality must be mainstreamed throughout the new framework and a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment is of key importance.
- Having said that, I want to emphasise that for the same reasons, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, need to be acknowledged in the work ahead.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- As the Secretary General has stated; defining the post-2015 development agenda is a daunting yet inspiring and historic task for the United Nations and its Member States.
- We must work together, and in so doing we must continue to listen to and involve the peoples of the world. The world's nations must unite behind a common vision to act on peoples aspiration. No one must be left behind.
- Thank you.