

Excellencies,

I want to start by thanking his Majesty King Jordan, the President of Egypt, and the Secretary General of the UN for hosting this important and very timely conference. It is crucial that we come together to strengthen our collective response to the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in Gaza and start paving the way towards a more peaceful and stable future for the people of Israel and Palestine.

As we have discussed today, the task at hand is enormous. We are faced with one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent years, which is bound to leave a permanent mark on the people of Gaza. We commend the work of the United Nations, UNRWA, WFP, and other humanitarian actors who have pursued their critical efforts despite the almost impossible conditions on the ground.

From my point of view, as Minister of Children's Affairs, it has been especially heartbreaking to witness the catastrophic toll this conflict has taken on children and youth. As UNICEF has highlighted, there are no safe spaces in Gaza – all of Gaza's children have been subjected to the traumatic horrors of war with life lasting consequences.

Not only can the killing, maiming, or taking children as hostages, never be justified – their unimaginable suffering and deprivation also threatens to undermine peace and trust between the people of Israel and Palestine for generations to come.

Humanitarian access and enhanced humanitarian assistance is crucial. Children now dying from hunger and lack of healthcare and medicine is a fact that has to be stopped. When it comes to plans for recovery, reconstruction and reform, it is also critical that the needs and rights of children will not only be taken carefully into consideration, children have to be at the center of all reconstruction plans.

How we help the young generation deal with the trauma will be the best measurement of how strong the foundations of the reconstruction will be.

Iceland will make an additional contribution to UNRWA this week, almost doubling its core contribution.

Ultimately, all measures must be taken to stop this vicious cycle of violence and revenge and to prevent further violence against children. Iceland has long called for an immediate ceasefire, a surge in humanitarian aid, and the release of all hostages. All parties to the conflict need to comply with international law and the resolutions passed by the UN Security Council. It is also critical that Israel abide by the orders of the International Court of Justice.

We strongly support all mediation efforts and the peace plan presented by President Biden, as outlined in the resolution passed yesterday in the Security Council. It is critical that both parties to the conflict urgently implement this resolution.

The reform agenda put forward by the Palestinian Government promises to lay the foundations for democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Palestine. To succeed, they will need the full support of the international community and clear focus on the prosperity of future generations.

Even though Iceland is a small country, we will do what we can. Having recognized Palestine in 2011, Iceland will seek ways to support the implementation of this plan – including through UNRWA and other UN agencies, the World Bank, and grass root organizations, of which Iceland is a committed supporter. It is also essential that we take Israel's legitimate security concerns into account as the horrors of October 7th have left Israelis living in greater fear than ever before.

At this point, courage and leadership is needed to make hard and challenging decisions that must eventually overcome the deep grievances, distrust and anger that has been sown over decades and culminated in this tragic war.

We must insist that children's rights are respected and prioritized immediately. Time is running out for the children of Gaza. We must insist that this horror that is their reality is stopped, and rights of children are respected both in Gaza and Israel. This will be the key to any possibility of creating a future of peace, stability and prosperity.