

**COP-17, HLS, Durban, South-Africa
Intervention by Iceland, 8 December 2011**

Our task here in Durban is complex, but outside these halls the picture is becoming clearer. Global emissions are increasing. So are global temperatures and the visible signals of climate change. Scientists predict that current pledges of emissions cuts are not sufficient to keep us on a 2° C path. We may instead be facing a warming of 3° or more, which will have drastic and even catastrophic effects in many regions, including small island developing states and large parts of our host continent of Africa.

We urgently need mitigation action. Iceland bases its climate policy on an Action Plan, that specifies both economy-wide and sector-specific mitigation measures. A general carbon tax has been set, and emissions trading is starting soon for sectors responsible for over 40% of Iceland's emissions. These measures send signals throughout the economy that it pays to cut emissions. These measures work. One example: Carbon-based taxes and fees on fuel and vehicles have resulted in many car-owners switching from gasoline to climate friendly fuels, such as methane gas collected from landfills.

All countries need to contribute to climate mitigation in line with their potential and capacity to do so. But we can not rely on voluntary action by individual countries. We need a transparent rules-based international system, which guides States to act in tandem to cut emissions. That is what the UNFCCC is intended to encourage, and that is what the Kyoto Protocol is designed to deliver. Iceland is ready to take on new commitments under the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. We must of course acknowledge that the Kyoto Protocol alone can not and will not deliver the global emissions cuts needed. Without a broad effort by all major emitters we risk failure in our task of halting global warming at 2° or a lower level. Iceland will take active part in the European Emissions Trade Scheme starting next year and believes it therefore to be sensible to take on new commitments under the second commitment period in a joint effort with EU member states. This is reflected in Iceland's pledge on emissions cuts to 2020.

We need common mitigation rules, but we must allow for the fact that countries' mitigation potential varies widely. Power generation is the biggest CO2 emitter worldwide, with the greatest mitigation potential. In Iceland, the opposite is true, as almost 100% of stationary power comes from renewables. Efforts to cut emissions largely focus on mobile sources, transport and the fishing fleet. On the other hand, Iceland has significant potential for carbon sequestration in vegetation and soil. Iceland intends to further its efforts to curb emissions from land use and enhance carbon uptake by sinks; by reclaiming degraded forests and wetlands and by revegetating eroded areas. Such efforts can greatly benefit biodiversity and nature conservation as well as the climate. Iceland attaches great importance to robust LULUCF rules under the Kyoto Protocol, that provide incentives for win-win actions in land use and forestry. We can not afford to dismiss one of the key sectors of climate change mitigation.

The Icelandic government provides 1 million dollars under Fast Start Finance and is looking towards strengthening its climate-related contributions to developing countries. Iceland now hosts programmes of the UN University in fields of geothermal energy, fisheries and revegetation, all of which are directed towards projects for climate mitigation. A fourth programme, on gender equality, will integrate gender issues in climate and environment into its curriculum. Iceland believes it is essential to ensure an active role of women at all levels of decision-making and financing in climate affairs. A programme to evaluate gender-related effects of climate change in Uganda, as well as appropriate policy responses, is now underway in cooperation between government agencies in Uganda, Iceland, Norway and Denmark.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Perhaps nowhere are the impacts of climate change more visibly than in the High North. The past six years are the warmest such period on record in the Arctic. Sea ice is retreating and thinning faster than was predicted by the IPCC only a few years ago. The Arctic Ocean, frozen for millenia, could become ice-free in summer before 2050. Nearly all glaciers and ice caps are shrinking. Three years ago the Icelandic government founded a national park centred around the glacier Vatnajökull, one of Earth's biggest icecaps outside the polar regions. The glacial tongues of Vatnajökull are all retreating. These visible barometers of climate change in Europe's largest national park will serve as a reminder to us to speed up our work. The message from Vatnajökull and the Arctic is clear: We need to halt the retreat and step up our collective effort.

Thank you,