

# Kynning Íslands á innleiðingu heimsmarkmiðanna (Voluntary National Review)

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Thank you, Mr. Vice President, your excellencies and distinguished guests.

I am very pleased to be here today and present Iceland's first voluntary national review. I am joined by representatives from the Icelandic Youth Council for the SDGs and a representative from the innovative climate solution Carbflix.

Let me begin by applauding the UN for their comprehensive work towards sustainable development which is the only way to a prosperous future for people and the planet. The 2030 Agenda will open a door to the future we need.

My government is fully committed to this agenda – at home and in our international work and we have chosen 65 priority targets which reflect Iceland's main challenges in implementing the goals.

I will begin by talking about the biggest challenge of all, climate change, which embraces all other challenges. It is a crisis for humanity as a whole that renders traditional territorial borders meaningless.

And to achieve results in that fight we need to correct the intergenerational injustice and the economic inequality at the core of the climate crisis. We need social justice. We need peace. We need gender equality. We need co-operation between governments, local communities, companies, NGOs, academia and the general public. And we need international co-operation more than ever.

Iceland is committed to the Paris Agreement and we aim for a carbon neutral Iceland no later than in 2040. We will also seek to achieve, with EU states and Norway, a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. In order to fulfil these commitments my government is working according to an ambitious action plan on climate issues. The emphasis to begin with is on energy shift in the transport sector, by switching over to renewables, and increasing carbon capture, and we will talk a little bit about new and fascinating solutions when it comes to carbon capture later in this panel.

Your excellencies.

In Iceland's VNR report we have highlighted our main challenges under each goal.

If I take SDG five for an example - despite Iceland being a front-runner in gender equality for ten years in a row, according to the World Economic Forum, there is plenty of space for improvement and we still face many challenges. One of the priorities of my government is to eradicate gender based and sexual violence. This is often not measured when we talk about

gender equality but has a staggering effect on the labour participation of women and their roles in the public sphere.

Iceland was a pioneer when it introduced shared parental leave, with a use it or lose it proportion to fathers, in the year 2000. It has changed norms and behaviour in a meaningful way and enabled men to engage in their children's early lives and at the same time been supportive to women's constant participation in the labour market.

We have put in place laws to ensure equal representation in boards, however this has yet to be translated into more female CEOs. We also have a new law to enforce a decade old legislation on equal pay, but we still need to address the labour market segregation that contributes largely to the absolute gender pay gap.

Gender equality is one of the corner stones of Iceland's foreign policy and in our international development cooperation, we put emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment as we strongly believe in gender equality as a human right and as a driver of economic and social development.

In Iceland we watch our glaciers retreat every year in front of our eyes. Climate change is changing our land, our ecosystems, our society and our economy. Sustainability is about the balance of these factors and to achieve the SDGs we must ensure that all our policies embrace that balance. Iceland knows, as a nation of fisheries, that our marine resources must be used sustainably. If our waters will turn acid because of climate change – if there is more plastic in our marine ecosystem than fish – we won't be able to build our economy on that valuable resource.

And the same applies for other important sectors of the Icelandic economy. Tourism won't be sustainable if our spots of natural beauty will become overcrowded and polluted. I could continue – but these examples show clearly the importance of developing economy and society sustainably and in harmony with the environment.

Dear colleagues.

Last year, Iceland was elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council and will hold a seat there to the end of this year. This is a unique opportunity to influence issues such as women's rights and gender equality, the rights of LGBTI people and the rights of children – in order to leave no-one behind.

Dear colleagues.

Young people around the world, including Iceland, are showing that they deeply care about the condition of our planet, not least by attending climate strikes. We should all listen and take serious action.

When I served as a minister for education, research and culture in 2009 to 2013 I promoted a new curriculum where sustainability, democracy and gender equality are three fundamental pillars. Later today it is a special honour for me to host an event about youth, climate action and democracy but there I will be joined by an all-youth panel, with prominent youth voices from all over the world.

There is no denying that achieving the Paris Agreement will require not only technological progress, but also require significant changes in the way we consume and live, especially in the Nordic countries, where we have a large environmental footprint. This is a big challenge. Our work towards the SDGs is for our children and future generations.

And now it is my pleasure to give the floor to Kristbjörg Mekkín Helgadóttir and Sigurður Einarsson Mäntylä from the Icelandic Youth Council for the SDGs, followed by a short introduction from Edda Sif Pind Aradóttir, a representative from Carbfix.

Thank you and I hope the Carbfix solution will be beneficial to many. My government has signed a trilateral declaration with, on the one hand, Reykjavík Energy and, on the other hand, heavy industry companies in Iceland, which are responsible for 40% of Iceland's carbon emissions, to work together on carbon capture and storage by the use of Carbfix. The companies will each aim to be carbon neutral in 2040.

This encourages us to think in various kinds of solutions to secure more sustainable lifestyles and inclusive communities. We need broad collaboration to tackle our big challenges.

I'm looking forward to our continuing efforts in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda, through domestic as well as international venues.