

30. maí 2008

**Address of H. E. Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir,  
Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Iceland,  
At the High Level Conference on World Food Security:  
The Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy,  
Rome 3 – 5 June 2008.**

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Allow me to express my appreciation for the initiative that the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has taken in calling this high level conference on rising food prices, and the effects of climate change and increasing production of biofuel on the world's food security. FAO, as well as the two other UN agencies in Rome; the WFP and the IFAD, have been charged with the task of promoting food security, providing emergency food relief and furthering agricultural development. The expertise of these agencies provides us with valuable tools in our struggle to achieve the goals of the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996 and the Millennium Development Goals.

- 0 -

Food prices have been rising at an alarming rate in the last months, threatening the livelihood of the rural and the urban poor. The increasing oil prices and growing demand for energy, not least in the rapidly growing economies in Asia, is equally alarming. The effects of climate change, including rising temperatures, deforestation, floods and desertification, are now felt all over the world. Temperature changes in the oceans could affect fish stocks, which many coastal communities build their economies on. In vulnerable rural areas in Africa, Asia and Latin America climate change could reduce land quality and water availability, and thus affect the existence of millions. Such prospects are especially alarming since agriculture is crucial to eradicating hunger and poverty. Unless appropriately addressed, the effect of climate change could quickly undermine advances towards the Millennium Development Goals.

The international community is increasingly aware of the gender aspect of climate change, as demonstrated by the FAO meeting on *Gender and Climate Change*, held in connection with the International Women's day this year. The poor will be most

affected by climate change and 70 % of the world's poor are women. The effect of climate change on gender equality and women's empowerment could be profound, given their central role in food production in many regions, and could diminish considerably the progress we have made so far in securing gender equality. We need to strengthen the role of women in the decision-making process on sustainable development, including climate change. Women need to have equal access to training, credit and skills programmes to ensure their full participation in climate change initiatives.

- 0 -

In a world with a growing population, the keys to sufficient food production are efficiency coupled with sustainability. Iceland has concentrated its efforts mainly in three areas; fisheries management and utilization of living marine resources, active development of renewable energy sources, and soil conservation technology.

Coming from a food producing and exporting country, I would also like to emphasize the importance of free trade for the food security in the world. My Government has made a determined effort to make free trade agreements, bilateral and multilateral, which take into account Parties' diverse level of development. It must be ensured that the developing countries are active participants in the global food trade, and that within the framework of WTO negotiations, the developing countries will gain from trade liberalisation.

Commercial market forces, such as supermarket chains, now play a larger role than ever in contributing to Food Security. The private sector needs to shoulder its responsibilities and act in a sustainable manner. This is especially important, since increased investment in agriculture is of paramount importance in our endeavours to feed the world.

- 0 -

Increased demand for energy should be met with the development of alternative energy resources, emitting less green-house gases. Agricultural food production capacity should not be converted into producing biofuel. It would be a short-sighted answer to the problem of carbon emissions. Developing renewable and sustainable sources of energy is a part of the solution and also a key to sustainable food production, not least in the developing world. There are vast untapped geothermal

30. maí 2008

resources. In close to one hundred countries, geothermal energy is found in some form or another. To give you an example: The current production of geothermal power in the vast East African Rift Valley area is only 150 MW. The potential, however, is estimated close to 14 thousand MW. My Government promotes the utilization of geothermal energy through the UNU Geothermal Training Programme, in which almost 400 people from 140 countries have participated.

I would like to emphasize the linkage between climate change and land degradation, which is one of the world's greatest environmental threats, endangering food security and increasing poverty. This development, to an extent,, can be reversed. A significant part of atmospheric greenhouse gases can be returned to soils and ecosystems, increasing their fertility and biodiversity. Iceland has over 100 years of experience in reclaiming land from erosion through the oldest Soil Conservation Service in the world. Last year, a new training programme on land restoration was initiated in Iceland with the objective of becoming a part of the United Nations University system within a few years.

Fish is one of the most valuable sources of nutrition and income for developing countries. Ninety-five per cent of those who live from fisheries are in the developing world and a billion people depend on fisheries for their main intake of protein. The share of the developing countries in the export of fish and fishery products is over 50%, with the net income of more than 20 billion USD. The fact that the earnings from these products for the developing countries exceed the foreign exchange revenues earned from any other major traded food commodity demonstrates the high value of fishery products. We have cooperated with many developing countries in building up their capacity in fisheries through the UN University Fisheries Training Programme in Iceland.

- 0 -

30. maí 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen.

The rising price of food has an impact on all families around the world. Failure to address this properly will cause a major reversal for development and could have considerable implications for peace and security around the world.

Climate change, rising food prices and increased demand for energy threaten economic and political stability in many vulnerable areas.. This complex situation requires strong leadership and coordination. The initiative and involvement of all relevant parts of the United Nations system will be essential. Iceland therefore welcomes the initiative taken by FAO here today.