

COP-15, Copenhagen**Intervention by Svandís Svavarsdóttir
Minister for the Environment, Iceland**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Climate change is profoundly affecting the fundamentals of Earth's ecosystem and the foundations of human civilization. Climate change endangers food production and the livelihoods of millions of people. Climate change is a serious threat to development.

This comes as no news to the delegates at this conference. This is no news to the tens of thousands of people that have come here to the beautiful city of Copenhagen with hope in their hearts that we will seal a deal for a greener future. This is no news to millions of people in vulnerable regions of the world who are already seeing the impacts of climate change and fear worse to come.

Still, many of the effects of climate change are hidden from sight. Our greenhouse gas emissions are affecting our oceans, with potentially dire consequences. Ocean acidification due to higher carbon concentrations is a serious threat to the future of marine life, especially in the tropics and the polar regions. Fisheries is Iceland's most important economic sector, and our livelihood and future depends on a healthy marine ecosystem. Climate change is a threat to ecosystems in the oceans as well as on land.

But that is why we are here – to avert catastrophic climate change. Iceland believes we must try to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius. Global greenhouse gas emissions will have to peak soon and decrease. Iceland is committed to become a low-carbon economy. We already rely 100% on renewables for electricity production and heating, and we will attempt to phase out fossil fuels for cars and ships. Afforestation and revegetation on eroded lands are important parts of Iceland's climate strategy. We can and must conserve and reclaim forests and wetlands to help the climate as well as biodiversity. Better land use, supported by robust science and verifiable reporting, is an important factor in climate mitigation.

No country or group of countries can solve the climate challenge by themselves. We need a common framework and a global comprehensive agreement, legally binding for all. Developed countries must lead in mitigating climate change and cutting emissions. All major emitters, however, must take part, and smaller parties as well. Iceland will do its fair share. In partnership with other countries, Iceland is ready to take on significant emission cuts in the medium term. Iceland is ready, in a joint effort with the European Union, to cut emissions up to 30 percent from 1990 levels to 2020, as part of an ambitious global agreement.

The damaging effects of climate change will be felt most keenly in small island states and other vulnerable developing countries. Iceland will contribute to assist developing countries in adaptation and capacity building. Iceland has established an international programme to build up capacity for revegetation in developing countries. The Land Restoration Training Programme will join a capacity-building programme in geothermal energy under the auspices of the UN University, as keystone efforts of Iceland to build up capacity in climate change mitigation.

We must empower people to adapt to the changes that will inevitably come. We can not succeed without using all our human resources. We have to empower women in every aspect of addressing climate change - in adaptation, in mitigation, in policy decisions and in implementing actions. Gender equality in climate affairs is not just a question of justice and fairness, it is essential for success. Women must be agents of change in building a sustainable future.

Chair, ladies and gentlemen,

Iceland has come to Copenhagen to announce an ambitious target to cut greenhouse gas emissions, and a willingness to participate in a robust global agreement to curb climate change. The eyes of the world are upon us.

The hour is late. We will leave Copenhagen soon. But the challenge of climate change is not leaving. Our responsibility will follow us home. We have to build trust. We have hard work ahead of us: Leaders, governments and citizens of the world. Let us build a low-carbon sustainable future. Let us work together for a better planet Earth. The verdict of our children will await us.

Thank you,