



Address
by the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at the Opening of the Iceland Days
in the UN Headquarters in New York
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The speech was recorded in Iceland
and delivered as a video presentation.

Your Excellencies,

Dear Friends.

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all here tonight, and I am deeply sorry not to be able to be with you in person. A few days ago I underwent a minor procedure in the excellent National Hospital in my country and consequently the doctors strongly advised against flying across the ocean for the next two weeks or so. However, they assured me that in the coming months and years I will be able to execute my duties and work with people all over the world in the same manner as before.

Last week, in the midst of the great crisis in the global financial system, the Nordic nations received an excellent news, and I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate my dear friend Martti Ahtisaari, the former President of Finland, on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. His

contributions over many decades to settling conflicts and bringing peace to nations in Europe, Africa, and Asia are a splendid example of the classical Nordic tradition, how our countries have worked towards peace and harmonious cooperation ever since the United Nations was founded.

This is especially important in these challenging times when the collapse of the international financial system and the threat of irreversible climate change will bring new problems and require urgent solutions.

In such endeavours, the role played by small states is especially important, since they have the great advantage of being a threat to no one. They have no hidden agenda, and cannot deploy military might, financial power or strong political pressure to achieve their aims. Such qualities are genuinely valuable at a time when complex relations, fear, and even terror, underlie the coexistence of nations.

Not only in Europe, but also in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, the Caribbean and the Middle East, small states now form a significant part of the political and economic mosaic. Increasingly, they are playing significant roles within global and regional institutions, and through their election to the Security Council, they have become, in the company of the major powers, crucial players when issues of peace and security are decided.

Iceland is indeed both proud and honoured that in the election to the Security Council which will take place in the next few days, our candidature is on behalf of all the Nordic countries, representing the long-standing Nordic contribution to peace and security for which Martti Ahtisaari has now been honoured.

While small nations certainly need to tackle a variety of problems, they also have many important assets. In the current global financial

hurricane, Iceland and others have been reminded, to use an analogy, that when a hurricane passes over the ocean towards powerful mainlands, it usually first crosses small islands where the destruction can be substantial. However, experience also shows that small states, due to their flexibility and the closely-knit networks of cooperation which characterize their societies, can recover surprisingly quickly.

In our present situation, we Icelanders are fortunately aware that despite the current financial challenges, our long-term resources are fundamentally strong: enormous wealth in the potential for clean energy production, both geothermal and hydro, strong fish stocks, large reservoirs of fresh drinking water, which is in increasing demand all over the world, plus a breathtaking natural wilderness which every year attracts greater numbers of tourists.

Iceland also serves as an example of how to combat climate change through a comprehensive transformation of energy systems. In the early years of my life, over 80% of Iceland's energy needs were met by using coal and oil. My daily duty in the fishing village where I grew up was to carry the coal and check the oil so we could cook our meals and warm our dwellings. We knew no energy sources except fossil fuel.

Now, 100% of Iceland's electricity is produced from clean energy resources, geothermal and hydro. Within the lifetime of one generation, we have transformed Iceland from being predominantly a fossil-fuel user into a world leader in the production and consumption of clean energy, making us an uncontested champion of sustainable energy.

In recent years, we have created clean energy projects in California and China, in East Africa, Western Europe, Central America and Asia, a fundamental proof that even the smallest of nations can provide leadership in solving the greatest challenge of our times.

History shows that the contributions made by small states towards reforming the international community and making the world more civilized are far out of proportion to the size of their populations. The explanation lies partly in their flexibility, in their ability to act and initiate when others are silent and passive, in their freedom to engage in operations which would be unthinkable if larger countries were involved.

Over the last twelve months or so, I have had the opportunity to meet many of you at the United Nations, engaging in a dialog on how Iceland could play a constructive role within the Security Council.

Together with the Ministers of the Icelandic government, our excellent Ambassador, my old friend Hjálmar, and others, we have committed ourselves to carry out our duties, if elected, in a transparent and responsible way, continuing the dialog which we have established with all of you over the preceding months.

I want to thank you for the contribution each and every one of you has made to these discussions, and as a token of our gratitude, we are inviting you to this table of Icelandic cuisine, in the spirit of the farmers and the fishermen who throughout the centuries always welcomed their friends in a special way.

I am also pleased that our Foreign Minister, Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir is, despite her recent operation, able to be with you here tonight. Her courage and determination is a clear demonstration of the fighting spirit of the Icelanders.

With these words I welcome you again and invite my friend the Foreign Minister to address you.