



HLPF General Debate 2022 – Iceland

Delivered by Youth Representative, Kolbrún Friðja Hrafnkelsdóttir

When we last met in-person, we witnessed progress being made in some critical areas of the Sustainable Development Goals. Progress was slow, but there was reason to perhaps be hopeful. It is harder to be hopeful today.

Due to COVID-19, climate change, and conflicts, the 2030 Agenda is under threat. Life expectancy has shortened, more people live in extreme poverty, billions of children have missed out on schooling and 2 billion people live in conflict-affected countries. This is not a time we should be fighting each other. This is a time when we should be working hard together to face humanity's greatest threats, such as climate change and biodiversity loss.

Iceland recognizes that **quality education** is a fundamental human right and should be accessible to everyone. This is needed now more than ever, as we face a global education crisis with an estimated 70 per cent of 10-year-olds unable to understand a simple written text. The current education systems are lacking and need to adapt to a changing world and enable each diverse individual to blossom according to their strengths. We look forward to the Transforming Education Summit in September.

Gender equality is a cornerstone of Iceland's development cooperation for the exact same reasons it is prioritized back home. It is a human right and improving gender equality is key for economic prosperity and positive social changes.

Iceland is often considered a global benchmark for gender equality. Regardless, we still require significant improvements to achieve SDG5 in time. To secure women's full sexual and reproductive health and rights, Iceland passed in 2019 a progressive abortion legislation, ensuring women self-determination over their bodies. Iceland has also adopted a new Act on Gender Autonomy, allowing individuals to determine their gender registration regardless of sex characteristics, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. We see this as an important step towards achieving SDG5, not least in the current global climate where we are seeing a reversal on women's human rights.

Ocean affairs are crucial to climate action, feeding the world population and economic development. Unfortunately, we still have a long way to go to reach SDG14. In Iceland, we see the effects of the climate in the waters that surround our island. In response, we have ambitious goals on achieving carbon neutrality by no later than 2040. Although, we acknowledge we need to do more and we need to act fast.

A healthy ocean is viable to achieve but we are standing in our own way. As highlighted at the recent UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon, strong international cooperation based on international law and organizations, on the foundation of science and sustainability, and with the participation of governments, businesses, civil society and youth, is needed to start a new chapter of ocean action.



In closing, an urgent rescue effort is needed to recover and enable steady progress towards the SDGs. This requires radical and innovative thinking. Young people are often the most radical and innovative. My message to the world leaders is therefore: listen to young people, engage us in a meaningful manner and follow-through on your promises with action. We see a lot of promises, a lot of solutions, and a lot of international agreements but where is the action? We look forward to following up on Our Common Agenda, including through the Declaration on Future Generations, Youth Office and the Summit of the Future next year and – much stronger engagement of young people at the UN. Our time has come.

Thank you.