

Opening remarks by
Mr. Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson
Minister for Foreign Affairs
University of Iceland, 2 July 2013
Lecture by the Secretary-General of the UN

Mr. Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon,
President of Iceland, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson,
former President, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir,
Rector of the University of Iceland, Kristín Ingólfssdóttir,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to welcome the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, to Iceland. The Secretary-General has a busy schedule, and knowing the challenges he faces as the top official of the UN, I take this opportunity to say how pleased we are to host him in Iceland.

The United Nations remain at the core of the multilateral system governing international relations. It is the organisation where all states, big and small, are represented at an equal level. Its actions, based on the UN's three main pillars of peace and security, human rights and development, continue to make a difference in the every day life of all of us.

Important milestones have been reached on all three fronts throughout the history of the UN. Some issues have been successfully addressed, while new challenges have emerged.

But the work, by its very nature, remains constant. The United Nations – and we, the peoples of the United Nations – must continue always to create a better world for mankind.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Icelanders have been strong supporters of the UN from the beginning. Like others, we have benefitted from the work of the UN. We are blessed with peace and prosperity in this part of the world and it is our responsibility and obligation to contribute to the work of the UN – and we have much to contribute.

Each one of us has a role to play; that is in essence the message of the United Nations. We are all part of one humanity, and what unites us far outweighs that which separates us.

Of course, Iceland as a small island state does not realistically have the capacity to be active on all fronts.

But we can struggle for the universal values of human rights and equality, we have our voice among nations and we can bring our expertise to the table. We have shown, even just very recently, that it doesn't take a superpower to advocate successfully for a worthy cause.

In the negotiations on a new Arms Trade Treaty we set out to have a provision on gender-based violence included in the Treaty. In cooperation with our Nordic cousins and other like-minded nations, we succeeded in our task. That is how the system should work, and how we individually – and together – can make a difference.

I am therefore very proud to inform you that today Iceland has ratified the Arms Trade Treaty. The necessary procedures were completed by the Government this

morning and the instrument of ratification has been signed by the President of Iceland. As far as we know Iceland is the first country in the world to ratify this important Treaty.

Dear friends,

Iceland is home to four training programmes of the United Nations University. Each one relates to specific expertise and experience Iceland has; in the field of fisheries, geothermal energy, land restoration and gender equality.

We are proud of these institutions and of the diversity of fellows that have graduated since their founding.

And we are extremely happy to be able in this fashion to contribute to the goals of the UN: the fight against poverty and for sustainable development of natural resources; for respect for basic human rights and for providing a place of mutual learning for people of many nations.

Through these very efforts, we make our own unique contribution to political stability in distant lands, and thus to world peace.

The Secretary-General will in his remarks discuss some of the key challenges facing the United Nations. I am looking forward to hearing his thoughts on how we can address climate change, end poverty and disease, create a more just world, where the rule of law, human rights and gender equality are upheld every day and world peace is maintained.

I know it is a tall order to ask of one man – but then again, Mr. Secretary-General, you are not alone: We are all in it together.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Mr. Ban Ki-moon has had a distinguished diplomatic career. He served 37 years in various capacities with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea and was at the time of his election as Secretary-General his country's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

He took office as Secretary-General of the United Nations on 1st of January 2007.

Mr. Secretary-General. The floor is yours.