



HAUT-COMMISSARIAT AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME • OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
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Excellency,

I have been following the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Iceland and welcome the constructive engagement of the Government of Iceland during the 40th session of the UPR Working Group in January/February 2022.

As the final outcome report on the review of Iceland was recently adopted by the Human Rights Council at its 50th session, I would like to take this opportunity to follow up on a number of areas raised in the two reports that my Office had prepared for the review of Iceland – the Compilation of United Nations information and the Summary of Stakeholders' submissions – which I consider in need of particular attention over the next four and a half years, until the next cycle of the UPR. In identifying those areas, I have considered the statements and recommendations made by 89 delegations and the presentation made and responses provided by the delegation of Iceland. I have also considered the actions taken by the Government of Iceland to implement the 133 recommendations supported during the second cycle of the UPR. The aforementioned areas cover a range of issues, which appear in the annex to this letter.

I welcome the ratification by Iceland of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, and the United Nations conventions on statelessness. I appreciate also that as a follow-up to the UPR recommendations, the Government of Iceland has decided to establish an independent National Human Rights Institution compliant with the Paris Principles, with a bill to be presented to Parliament in 2023.

I further welcome the fact that, in 2018, Iceland has become the first country in the world to require employers by law to obtain an equal pay certification to ensure equal pay for equal work. Similarly, I welcome the 2019 Act on Gender Autonomy, allowing individuals full autonomy to define their own gender and prohibiting unnecessary surgical procedures on intersex children, and that for 2022, Iceland doubled its contribution to the Global Equality Fund and committed to contributing to the United Nations Free and Equal campaign for the next three years. Of note also the fact that in June 2022, the Parliament of Iceland passed the first Action Plan on the rights of LGBTIQ+ individuals. Lastly, I take positive note of the commitment made by Iceland to achieve carbon neutrality before 2040 and to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 40 per cent by 2030 under the Paris Agreement. I encourage Iceland to formulate a comprehensive immigration policy, aimed at ensuring that persons who settle in Iceland fully integrate and actively participate in society and in the labour market, with their rights fully protected.

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H.E. Ms. Thórdís Kolbrún REYKJFJORD GYLFADOTTIR
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Iceland

I encourage Iceland to further develop and adopt a comprehensive national human rights action plan in order to achieve concrete results in the areas highlighted in the annex to this letter and to facilitate preparations for the fourth cycle of the UPR. My advice to all Member States is to develop and implement national action plans in close consultation and cooperation with all stakeholders, in particular all civil society organizations and, where necessary, with the support of international organizations, including my Office and other United Nations entities.

I also encourage Iceland to continue to strengthen the Government Offices Steering Committee on Human Rights for comprehensive reporting and follow-up to recommendations received from all international and regional human rights mechanisms and to treaty obligations, linking them to the Sustainable Development Goals. To this end, I strongly recommend the use of the OHCHR practical guide on this topic, which is available at:
http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/HR_PUB_16_1_NMRF_PracticalGuide.pdf

Please note that I am sharing my advice with all Member States as they go through the third cycle of the UPR with a view to assisting States with the implementation of the recommendations, following the review. One important measure that can positively contribute to follow-up action is voluntary mid-term reporting. Therefore, I strongly encourage all Member States to submit a voluntary mid-term report two years after the adoption of the UPR outcome report. In this regard, I welcome the practice of Iceland of submitting a mid-term report in the previous cycle and the statement by the Head of Delegation at the 40th session of the UPR Working Group and the 50th session of the Human Rights Council that Iceland will submit a mid-term report on follow-up to the third cycle of the review by 2024.

As stated by the Secretary-General in his 2017 report on the work of the Organization (A/72/1, paragraph 98): *“The Human Rights Council’s universal periodic review process is now entering a new cycle, with every Member State scheduled for a third round of scrutiny. We will work to strengthen the relevance, precision and impact of the Council’s recommendations, including by providing better support to Member States in implementation, stronger collaboration with United Nations country teams and the establishment of national mechanisms for human rights reporting and follow-up to link the universal periodic review to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.”*

My Office looks forward to discussing with you ways in which it may assist Iceland in relation to the areas identified in this letter and its annex.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Michelle Bachelet
High Commissioner for Human Rights

cc: Ms. Birgit VAN HOUT
Regional Representative the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OHCHR Regional Office for Europe
Belgium

Annex

Scope of international obligations and cooperation with international human rights mechanisms and bodies

- Advancing in the ratification of the main international human rights instruments to which the country has not yet acceded.
- Sharing internationally good practices on equal pay for equal work and providing technical assistance to countries to follow a similar system.

National human rights framework

- Establishing a national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles.
- Pursuing the development and adoption of a comprehensive national human rights action plan to strengthen consistency in implementing related policies and programmes.

Implementation of international human rights obligations, taking into account applicable international humanitarian law

A. Cross-cutting issues

Equality and non-discrimination

- Continuing its efforts to fight against discrimination, racism and hate speech.

Development, the environment, and business and human rights

- Continuing to intensify efforts to develop and strengthen the necessary legislative frameworks that address cross-sectoral environmental challenges, including climate change and disaster risk reduction frameworks.
- Finalizing the development of Iceland's National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights with the aim of promoting respect for human rights in business.

B. Civil and political rights

Right to life, liberty and security of person

- Strengthening the prevention of new forms of violence, such as online harassment.

Administration of justice, including impunity, and the rule of law

- Ensuring that Icelandic courts implement the new whistle-blowing legislation firmly to prevent attempts of intimidation against journalists and whistle-blowers by private persons

Fundamental freedoms

- Promoting the development of a more diverse media supply with the aim to further strengthen democratic debate.

Prohibition of all forms of slavery

- Continuing to allocate the necessary human, technical and financial resources to effectively implement its policies and procedures to combat trafficking in persons, with a focus on trafficking of women and children; taking further steps to improve the prosecution of human traffickers; and ensuring appropriate protection and assistance for the victims.

C. Economic, social and cultural rights

Right to work and to just and favourable conditions of work

- Ensuring a consistent effective enforcement of the Act on Equal Treatment on the Labour Market, and conducting awareness-raising campaigns among employers to prevent racial discrimination in the labour market.

Right to an adequate standard of living

- Continuing efforts to ensure that all retirees and persons with disabilities are able to enjoy an appropriate standard of living through the provision of adequate level of social security benefits and pensions and work opportunities.

Right to health

- Implementing human rights-based mental health policies aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and providing community-based mental health services, with a view to eliminate stigma, discrimination and coercion in mental health.

Right to education

- Further strengthening education policy to ensure that all persons are provided with equal opportunities to obtain quality teaching, to increase literacy and lessen withdrawal from upper secondary schools.

D. Rights of specific persons or groups

Women

- Continuing to provide adequate preventive measures in the fight against violence against women as well as support and counselling, and continuing to provide access to justice for victims, including foreign women and women from minority backgrounds.

Children

- Strengthening existing policies and measures at the national level to protect the human rights of all children in conditions of vulnerability, including children living in poverty and migrant and refugee-seeking children, equipping them with sufficient resources, and ensuring that they are guided by a comprehensive assessment of the best interests of the child.

Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers

- Ensuring the full realization of the rights of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants, and adopting a government action plan on migration.