



**Statement of Ambassador Kristín A. Árnadóttir in response to the Address  
by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk  
at the 1428 Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, 8 June 2023, Vienna**

*Thank you, Mr. Chair.*

Iceland thanks the High Commissioner, Volker Türk, for his comprehensive and important remarks and warmly welcomes you to the OSCE Permanent Council.

Iceland remains alarmed by the serious backlash against human rights, multilateralism, and democratic values we are witnessing, with a staggering rise in nationalism, racism, religious intolerance, homophobia, and transphobia. We have also witnessed increased hate speech and a global pushback on the precious gains that have been made towards gender equality and women's rights, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Many of the basic rights, we may have thought to be secured and guaranteed are challenged. It is urgent that we act and fight against these trends. International cooperation is thereof a critical component – of promoting, protecting, and implementing human rights for all.

Iceland was honoured to play its part during our Presidency of the Council of Europe, by hosting the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Heads of State and Government. The Reykjavík Summit delivered important outcomes as leaders united around Ukraine and our values of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

*Mr. Chair,*

Human rights are a core priority for Iceland, at home and abroad. Iceland firmly upholds the principle that human rights are universal and apply equally to all. We strive to see this reflected

in all areas of Icelandic society. We have placed gender equality at the core of decision-making, which we will continue to do with the aim of creating a socially just, more peaceful and better world.

Climate change remains one of the biggest challenges of our time, a direct threat to lives and livelihoods, with profound implications for human rights. This relationship between human rights and the environment was among our main priorities both during our membership of the Human Rights Council in 2018-2019 as well as our Council of Europe presidency.

*Mr. Chair,*

The opening words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are clear: *“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”*

The full realization and advancement of human rights is inherently an ongoing, never-ending process. We are forever reminded that human rights and women’s rights can be lost just as they can be won. New challenges are continuously emerging, calling for thoughtful and lasting solutions.

With a war in Europe, and the democratic backsliding preceding it, it has never been as important that we reverse these trends and work together to secure the human rights of all people, in our countries, our region, and the world. None of our rights can be taken for granted and we must continue to demonstrate strength, resilience, and unity.

To conclude, against the backdrop of Russia’s brutal war of aggression against Ukraine, in blatant violation of international law and the UN Charter and a direct assault on the rule-based multilateral system, your presence here today is of much importance and significance. In an evolving European security landscape, it is critical that the Multilateral Architecture remains strong and united.

*I thank you.*