

## Overview of Iceland's Commitments for a Summit for Democracy

### Overview

The respect for **democratic principles** and **human rights** lies at the heart of Iceland's national identity and underpins the Government's policy, both at home and abroad. Iceland prides itself on having the longest running Parliament in the world, which since 930 AD has exemplified the fundamental feature of democratic systems: that power originates with the people.

While the foundations for a vibrant democracy and a society respectful of fundamental rights are well established in Iceland, Icelandic authorities have long recognized that advancing and nurturing these principles is a **continuous process of hard work and determination**. Accordingly, successive governments have made great strides towards ensuring that fundamental rights are firmly established through national legislation and implementation measures.

This firm commitment to advancing human rights and freedoms, will be reflected in Iceland's third report to the United Nations Human Rights Council, under the **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** mechanism, which is currently under preparation.

Since its last UPR, Iceland has, among other things, implemented measures to combat domestic violence and sexual abuse and to improve the rights of LGBTI individuals. This includes the implementation of the **Gender Autonomy Act**, which strengthens the rights of trans and intersex people. Moreover, the Icelandic Government has adopted a **reform of the Criminal Law** with a clause to protect individuals from sexual violations by digital means.

Democracy and human rights are also central to **Iceland's foreign policy**, demonstrated by a strong record of active advocacy of these fundamental values both in bilateral relations and in multilateral fora. Iceland's Policy on International Development Cooperation adopts a human rights-based approach, recognizing human rights as a foundation for sustainable development, peace, and prosperity.

As a committed member of the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Council of Europe, **Iceland systematically uses these fora to promote**

**human rights and democratic principles** and join calls giving attention to situations of systematic violations of human rights.

A clear example is Iceland's recent membership on the **UN Human Rights Council**, where, replacing the US in 2018, Iceland took up a leadership role on important human rights concerns. This included the Philippines, where authoritarian tendencies had created a climate of impunity for extrajudicial executions and persecution of human rights activists and proponents of free media. Also, Iceland led a first-time joint statement of 36 states calling on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to improve its human rights situation, in particular women's rights and those of human rights defenders.

Iceland is committed to continue to use the Human Rights Council as a platform for the promotion of democracy and human rights and has already announced its candidacy, as a Nordic state, for a **seat on the Human Rights Council during 2025-2027**.

Additionally, Iceland will, in 2022, assume its chairmanship of the **Council of Europe**; a crucial body for the promotion and preservation of human rights in Europe. While Iceland's Chairmanship priorities are under development, Iceland will use this platform to engage meaningfully with all Council member states on the advancement of human rights and democratic values.

The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment has long been a priority for Iceland. The Government has taken on a range of international responsibilities to advance this critical agenda, with the most recent being a leading role in the **UN Generation Equality Forum** as a Coalition leader on Gender-Based Violence. In this context, the Government of Iceland agreed on a range of concrete actions – domestic and international - to be implemented over the next five years.

Iceland has a longstanding tradition of **cooperation** and **consultation** on human rights, collaborating across government and the public sector, along with civil society organizations, youth representatives and the private sector. This has been the approach taken in the preparation of Iceland's third UPR-report as well as in the process to develop Iceland's commitments under the Generation Equality Forum. Iceland's participation in the Summit on Democracy would be underpinned by the same approach.

**Below are some concrete examples of Iceland's commitments to promote democracy and human rights at home and abroad.**

**At home, Iceland is committed:**

- to implement a National Plan on **Business and Human Rights** to promote responsible business practices at home and overseas and give effect to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;
- to implement measures to strengthen and safeguard **media freedom**;
- to continue to combat the **increasing spread of disinformation**, including taking into account the findings of the recently convened national working group on disinformation and COVID-19;
- to continue to promote the **engagement of men and boys** in the achievement of gender equality for the benefit of all;
- to submit a national action plan regarding the enforcement of the **Istanbul Convention** on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence;
- to implement policy measures to support a **newly adopted reform of the Criminal Law** which amended the legislation in early 2021, with a clause protecting individuals from sexual violations by digital means;
- to implement legislation on the integration of services in the interest of **children's well-being**;
- to implement a newly approved comprehensive policy and action plan (2021-2025) on **preventing sexual and gender-based violence and sexual harassment** with a focus on children and youth within educational institutions; and,
- to implement a **gender equality consultation platform** that will be assembled at least once a year and include representatives of civil society partners, the academic community and gender equality organizations.

**Abroad, Iceland is committed:**

- to continue to advocate for the fundamental importance of freedom of speech and media freedom, including through Iceland's active membership of the **Media Freedom Coalition**;
- to promote the safety of journalists and respect for fundamental freedoms, pluralistic media and freedom of information, a priority focus of Iceland's candidature to the **UNESCO Executive Board 2021-2025**;
- to continue to address gender stereotypes and harmful masculinity, as a part of Iceland's role as a **HeforShe champion**;
- to continue to play an active role in strengthening international cooperation on LGBTI issues, including addressing discrimination, social stigma, and exclusion, i.a. through its membership at the **LGBTI Core Group** in New York and **the Equal Rights Coalition**; and,
- to continue to promote **Barnahus (the Children's House)** model, a multi-disciplinary response to child abuse ensuring appropriate help to child victims and focusing, in particular, on child-friendly justice proceedings;
- to continue to implement a **human-rights based approach** in its development cooperation, including through supporting education and health systems and fighting harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation;
- to continue to partner with civil society in Iceland's development cooperation and other regional cooperation in the protection of civic space, with the aim to strengthen the connection to the grassroots and the most marginalized populations in society;
- to continue to promote the core values of the multilateral system and the international rules-based order through close cooperation with likeminded countries, including through the **Alliance of Multilateralism**; and,
- to ratify by 2022 **ILO's Convention and recommendation on violence and harassment in the world of work** (no.190).

**In closing, Iceland welcomes the Biden-Harris administration's commitment to revitalize democracy and universal human rights, both at home and abroad, and looks forward to partnering with the United States to drive this important agenda forward.**