The Permanent Mission of Iceland
to the United Nations

Statement by
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY
Mr./Madam Chair,

To make a real and lasting change with the Post-2015 Development Agenda, desertification, land degradation and draught must get a proper place in the new set of goals.

Land degradation and desertification rank among the world’s greatest environmental challenges, greatly affecting climate, biodiversity, soil quality, food and water security and ultimately peace on earth. The Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development recognized this and called for urgent action to reverse land degradation.

This was a positive step, but still, this great challenge is not receiving the attention it deserves globally. Loss of soil and decline in ecosystem services is a silent crisis. The global community will not be able to achieve its other important goals of food and water security, eradicating poverty and meeting its Green House Gas targets without a major improvement in conservation and restoration of the world’s soil resources. While this is true let’s not forget that we have numerous success stories that can demonstrate that the forces of desertification can be halted, and land quality restored.

Mr./Madam Chair,

Against this background a total of 18 Member States came together last September to launch a Friends Group on Desertification, Land Degradation and Draught. The intention of the Friends Group is to maintain the momentum generated by the Rio+20 and raise awareness of the issue, while members are discussing and negotiating the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Iceland reiterates its commitment to strive to achieve a land degradation neutral world in the context of sustainable development, and would like to urge Member States to take crucial actions to reverse desertification, land degradation and drought.

We are committed to do this in partnership with United Nations system and other Member States and would like to encourage others to sign up to our list of friends committed to fight desertification, land degradation and draught.

Mr./Madam Chair,

My delegation wouldn’t be faithful to its conviction and origin if we did not mention the importance of the oceans and the need for practical goals and targets in the new development agenda. We will not be taken seriously if we forget 1 billion people in developing countries who depend on fish for their primary protein and the 350 million people who have jobs linked to the oceans. What will happen to these people, their food security as well as economic opportunities and prosperity, if we do nothing? We must recognize that the status quo is not an option.

The good news is that we have all the governance structures in place. We only need to implement the international goals, targets, codes and guidelines we have developed since 1992 when world leaders met in Rio.

To realize the change needed on the oceans we need first and foremost to commit ourselves to: sustainable fisheries management; capacity building; and stronger pollution control to keep the oceans healthy.

We don’t have to re-invent the wheel or come up with new targets and indicators to do this. We only need to take action. Most of the challenges as regards the oceans we need to solve
locally, only some regionally and very few globally. True changes come when people are empowered with responsibility and rights.

Mr./Madam Chair,
It is impossible to talk about the oceans without referring to the Law of the Sea Convention. The Law of the Sea Convention is like the “Constitution of the Sea”. Iceland has benefitted enormously from the progressive nature of the Convention and encourages all Member States who have not yet done so to accede to the Convention. A universal membership to the Convention would be a very good contribution to the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Mr./Madam Chair,
Gender equality and the empowerment of women, including ensuring their sexual and reproductive health and rights, are of major concern. There will be no real change without the participation of half of mankind. We will not be able to address climate change without women. We will not be able to address food security without women. This is why we firmly believe that we need not only a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women’s empowerment but also gender mainstreaming throughout the whole Post-2015 Development Agenda.

In that regard allow me to restate our firm position that the negotiations ahead of us should be inclusive by respecting the democratic nature of the United Nations and include all Member States. This is the only way to ensure that all of us are on board in the end when hopefully we succeed in developing the new development agenda.

Thank you, Mr./Madam Chair