

The 17th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

**Integrated Management of Land and Water Resources for Sustainable Agriculture
and Rural Development**

**Statement by Ambassador Gunnar Pálsson
Permanent Representative of Iceland**

At a round table

Thursday 14 May

At a time when the global financial and economic crisis may, regrettably, be slowing progress towards the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals, it is all the more important not to lose focus on sustainable development, including landcare, the bedrock of food security. I would like, at the outset, to echo the remarks made by the representative of the World Bank earlier, underlining the role of agricultural development in food security, as well as the need to mobilize greater participation of women in this domain.

Two billion people, about a third of humanity, live in drylands. These are areas that have the world's lowest per capita GDP, the highest infant mortality rates and tend to be more exposed than other parts of the world as a result of population pressure, land cover change and global climate change.

Therefore, it is in the drylands that the requirement for capacity building is most acutely felt. To meet that requirement, we need, among other things, to bring all three Rio Conventions into play and strengthen the scientific role and the knowledge management aspect of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

My own country, though far afield from the drylands, lost half of its vegetative cover and 95% of tree cover in the course of the last millennium. Through soil conservation efforts we have gradually been able reverse the process and reclaim some of our grasslands and woodlands.

No one will, of course, expect lessons learned in the sub-Arctic region to apply wholly to land conservation in other parts of the world. At the same time, we all agree that much can be learned by sharing knowledge and experiences. This is why my Government has, over the past three years, developed and funded a pilot program in Land Management and Restoration of Degraded Land in cooperation with the United Nations University. A number of young professionals from African and Asian countries, where desertification threatens livelihoods, have attended the program and training courses.

Based on this, I am pleased to inform you that Iceland will launch a formal United Nations University Training Programme next year in the field of land restoration. In this way, we hope that Iceland can contribute more effectively to our joint efforts to reverse of land degradation and promote sustainable food production in the future.