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UNFCCC COP-16/CMP-6, Cancún, Mexico
Statement by Iceland at High-Level Segment
Hugi Ólafsson, Director, Ministry for the Environment

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Iceland is here in Cancún to join other countries in strengthening the global framework to deal with climate change and take decisive steps to achieve a legally binding outcome from the current negotiations.

In Iceland, we can clearly see the impacts of climate change, most notably in our retreating glaciers. Other effects are more hidden. Ocean acidification is a threat to the magnificent coral reefs off the coast here in Cancún and elsewhere in warm seas. It is also a concern in the cool waters off Iceland, as the rate of acidification is among the fastest in Arctic and sub-Arctic seas. With unmitigated carbon emissions, the oceans may become more acidic in a near future than in any time for over 40 million years, with potentially dire consequences for marine life.

The Icelandic government last month adopted a new climate action plan, to strengthen existing efforts and ensure that Iceland can meet its pledges for cutting emissions by 2020. Iceland has taken up a carbon tax. Heavy industry and aviation will soon be subject to emissions trading. As Iceland relies almost 100% on renewables for energy production, sectoral actions to curb emissions focus on mobile sources, namely transport and fisheries. Research and development on low-carbon technology is to be enhanced, in fields such as geothermal technology, carbon mineralization and de-carbonizing shipping.

Afforestation and revegetation are important in Iceland's mitigation efforts, reversing past deforestation and soil erosion. Iceland also intends to restore drained wetlands. Drained peatlands and other organic soils are a vast source of emissions in Annex I-countries and worldwide, that demand better accounting and incentives to halt emissions.

The recent Nagoya meeting of the Conference on Biological Diversity agreed on new goals, including on restoring damaged ecosystems. Reclaiming forests, wetlands and grasslands involves a transfer of carbon from the atmosphere into the biosphere and soils. We need to take advantage of such win-win opportunities.

The Icelandic government recently decided to provide 1 million dollars for Fast Start Finance in 2010-2012. These resources will go to UNFCCC funds and to strengthen existing capacity-building activities for developing countries in fields where Iceland has relevant expertise, such as renewable energy and revegetation.

For Iceland – a small emitter in absolute terms – it is important to know that it is acting as a part of a truly global effort to reduce emissions. Iceland is ready to take on a QELRO in a Second Commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, as part of a legally binding global agreement with meaningful participation of all major emitters.

For an effective response to climate change, gender considerations must be taken into account in all aspects of our work. A sincere effort to address gender inequalities and to mobilize both women and men will not only make climate programmes more fair, but also more effective. We need the knowledge, ingenuity and leadership of all people, men and women, to tackle the challenge of climate change. We need to mobilize governments, but also communities and all relevant sectors of society. We need to commit globally and deliver at home.

Thank you,