



**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland**

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**Twenty-Ninth Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council**

**Łódź, 1 December 2022**

Mister Chair.

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I would like to thank you Zbigniew for inviting us to your hometown for this ministerial and my best thanks to Helga and her team, as well.

I represent a country with one of the smallest populations in our organization, one that has been blessed to have been spared the horrors of international war through its history. A country that does not have its own army. A country that—coincidentally—celebrates today the fact that it became a sovereign state on December 1st in 1918.

I mention this because it follows that Iceland is a country that relies on the fact that the world has decided—since the horrors of two world wars in the last century—to adhere to a system of international law and a rules-based order in international relations.

Not a system where the threats and use of violence by the big are allowed to dominate and subjugate the small.

This complicated system of high ideals is protected by institutions such as the OSCE that was founded to protect peace and security and foster justice and co-operation.

It is a system that—despite its flaws—is vastly and completely superior to any other method of resolving issues and disputes between states.

Now, with the unprovoked, brutal and illegal invasion by Russia into Ukraine, one of the powers that has been entrusted to be a guarantor of this world order has failed its duties and violated all the rules and norms of this organization and the multilateral system.

A famous Hemingway line describes how a person becomes financially bankrupt. Gradually, then suddenly.

I believe that we can apply this to the risk of the international system falling apart. Currently, this is happening gradually and we must prevent it from suddenly reaching a point of no return.

We are at such a critical juncture that when we look back at this time — 30 years from now — we will either look back with absolute sadness and horror to a catastrophe, or this will be considered a moment of strength and unity, when the international system managed to withstand its toughest test without breaking apart.

How leaders act and how institutions respond will determine the difference. This means us, and this means the OSCE.

In our dinner last night my Canadian colleague, Minister Joly, said that the current crisis is built on deterioration of the respect for human rights. I believe this is exactly the case.

Fewer people consider democracy, human rights and the rule of law, to be something that has to be protected and is worth defending. This is the gradual backsliding we have been witnessing, and we must urgently push back.

So our job is not to look only within but to be relentless advocates for democracy, freedom and a peace that is based on justice.

We know that since World War II the words „never forget“ have been used to highlight the importance of maintaining a common understanding within our societies about the horrible consequences that can follow if we move away from a world governed by rules and rights and into a world dominated by violence and might. But in order to never forget, we need to be constantly reminded.

To the representative of the Russian federation here today, I say. Stop. Stop this madness. Stop your attacks. Stop destroying Ukrainian infrastructure. Remove your troops from lands you have no right to.

To the rest of us, I say that it is our duty to play our role in strengthening the foundation of the multilateral system. We all have a role to play, including Iceland now as we currently chair the Council of Europe. These are critical times and we must rise to the occasion.

We each have a duty to do what we can for the common cause of freedom, human rights and peace.

Thank you.