



JUST ATONEMENT INC.

justice
hope peace unity
equal opportunity
golden age
progress sustainability democracy freedom
human rights harmony civilization

Just Atonement Inc.

119 W 24th Street, Second Floor
New York, New York 10011

Executive Director: [Dave Inder Comar](#)

Email: inder@justatonement.org

Telephone: [+1 646 600 5470](tel:+16466005470)

Just Atonement Inc. (JAI) is a global network of advocates who serve at the front lines in defending democracy, human rights, and a livable planet.

JAI was founded in the United States of America in 2017.

JAI invites and organizes legal professionals globally into a single order and aligns a vision of a peaceful, sustainable world, governed by the democratic rule of law; litigates in courts all over the world on cutting edge human rights cases to build peace and sustainability, and to defend democracy; and advocates for a vision of a true Golden Age for humanity: a world where countries settle their disputes peacefully, manage social and economic systems that are in harmony with the planet, and govern themselves through the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights.

JAI submits this written submission with respect to the Universal Periodic Review of Iceland.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. **The breakdown and collapse of the Earth's climate system is imminent and may have already commenced.** Melting glaciers in the Arctic region threaten the rights and freedoms of the Icelandic population. We commend Iceland for pursuing aggressive and ambitious climate goals, including increasing its emissions targets and becoming carbon neutral by 2040. Iceland should strive to be an example to the rest of the world of resilience in the face of the challenges of climate change, particularly with respect to the defense of human rights.
2. **Iceland has seen a recent decline in the strength of its democracy and the rule of law.** Since the last UPR cycle, Iceland's Global Freedom Score has declined by 6 points. In particular, Iceland has not provided adequate protections for migrant workers and those seeking asylum. We commend Iceland for introducing anti-discrimination legislation and advise that Iceland extend protections to include nationality as a protected class.



CLIMATE CHANGE

Impact of Climate Change

3. **Iceland is particularly susceptible to climate change.** 11% of Iceland's surface is comprised of glaciers and ice caps. Due to Arctic amplification, the Arctic region faces warming up to two to three times higher than the global annual average. The Icelandic population thus faces a disproportionate threat to life from climate change.

Ice Melt

4. **The retreat of Icelandic glaciers and ice caps is projected to continue.** In the warmest scenario considered, the Icelandic Meteorological Office expects the Langjökull ice cap to lose approximately 85% of its volume and the Hofsjökull ice cap and the southern part of the Vatnajökull ice caps to lose approximately 60% of their volumes by the end of the 21st century. Glacial retreat has already impacted Iceland's hydrological conditions, with increased glacial river runoff, new pro-glacial lakes, and altered river courses. Furthermore, ice melt would continue even in the absence of continued warming.
5. **Ice melt is causing crustal uplift in Iceland.** Due to decreasing surface pressure, ice melt is causing the land in Iceland to rise, over 20mm per year in certain areas. This accelerated uplifting is, in turn, accelerating ice mass loss. Iceland should assess the impact of this feedback loop.
6. **Ice melt is correlated with increased volcanic activity.** A 2017 study, led by the University of Leeds, found that ice melt in Iceland is correlated with increased volcanic eruptions since decreasing surface pressure also affects magma flow.¹ Though the timeline is undetermined, researchers believe that climate change has put Iceland on a path of more frequent volcanic activity.
7. **Increased volcanic activity further contributes to emissions.** Volcanic eruptions themselves also contribute to emissions by increasing particulate matter in the atmosphere. Thus, current levels of ice melt may already be forcing a "feedback loop" in which greater emissions levels are triggered through increased volcanic eruptions. Iceland should assess the risk of a dangerous feedback loop on this issue.

Natural Disasters

8. **Glacial retreat can lead to an increased risk of landslides.** As glaciers retreat, steep slopes previously buttressed by glaciers can be destabilised. If the path of a landslide intersects pro-glacial lakes—another consequence of glacial retreat—the risk of catastrophic floods is elevated. Warming soil may also increase the risk of landslides in

¹ University of Leeds. "Climate change could increase volcano eruptions." ScienceDaily. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/11/171123095405.htm (accessed June 1, 2021).



non-glacial areas.

9. **Iceland encountered an unprecedented landslide in December 2020.** The December 15 mudslide in Seyðisfjörður is ranked as the largest landslide to have damaged an urban area. The Icelandic Meteorological Office underestimated conditions, as the site had no indication of prehistoric landslides. The landslide reached deep into sediments that have not collapsed in millennia and occurred due to conditions that had not existed for thousands of years.
10. **Climate change has elevated the risk of wildfires in Iceland.** In June 2019, Iceland saw its longest drought to date since 1856. In May 2021, Iceland declared its first ever alert phase in connection with wildfires after a series of brush fires broke out in southwest Iceland. While the effect of warming on Iceland's precipitation is still attenuated, projections indicate that it is unlikely Iceland will see increased precipitation during the dry early part of the year.

Biodiversity

11. **Arctic marine ecosystems face disproportionately higher risk due to warming.** Icelandic waters have increased 1 to 2 degrees Celsius over the past two decades. Cold water species such as northern shrimp and capelin have vanished to colder waters, while mackerel, previously rare, have migrated north and are now found closer to Iceland.
12. **Ocean acidification is progressing rapidly in Icelandic waters.** Ocean acidification is affecting marine life as oxygen and nutrients are depleted, which can further damage marine biodiversity.
13. **Iceland has observed shifting biodiversity on land due to warming.** Warming has led both to an influx of new bird species and to a decline of various sea birds, likely due to changes in food stocks that are also affected by climate change. Continuous warming can bring new invasive species, pests, and insects that can damage crop yields.

Fishing Industry

14. **Iceland's fishing industry can be negatively affected.** Iceland's fishing industry is a main pillar of Iceland's economy. It employs over 5% of Iceland's workforce, and contributes 25% to Iceland's GDP when accounting for indirect effects of the ocean cluster. Rising land levels have resulted in more frequent port closures, and rapid changes in biodiversity are affecting fish stock. While Iceland's ability to fish has not yet been disrupted, an evolving ecosystem nevertheless can pose concerns for long-term viability of fishing as warmer waters can also introduce new predators and diseases.
15. **Changing biodiversity can also lead to geopolitical conflicts.** Changes in local fish stock can lead to geopolitical conflicts over natural resources as fisheries move to other areas. A lack of consensus can lead to overfishing, which can further exacerbate the marine ecosystem.



Tourism

16. **Climate change negatively impacts Iceland's tourism industry.** Iceland's economy is heavily dependent on tourism. It employs over 15% of the total workforce and contributes over 8% to Iceland's GDP. Glacier site visitation comprises a major source of tourists, and demand is highly impacted by climate change.

National Security

17. **The increase in Arctic militarisation poses a threat to the lives of the Icelandic population.** Climate change is decreasing Arctic ice and increasing economic opportunities for trade and transportation through the Arctic. This can increase geopolitical tensions in the North Atlantic, as Arctic-bordering nations (including many countries affiliated with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as well as Russia) look to increase their respective military presence in the region. Iceland, as a small state without a standing army, will likely face increased military pressures with little recourse.

Iceland's Contribution to Climate Change

18. **Iceland emits a disproportionate amount of CO₂ and has the highest CO₂ emissions per capita of all the Nordic countries at 9.80 tonnes.²** In comparison, the average CO₂ emissions per capita is 7.28 tonnes in Europe and 4.72 tonnes globally. Iceland's CO₂ emissions per capita also exceed that of China (7.10 tonnes) but are lower than that of the United States of America (16.06 tonnes), two large emitter nations. Iceland should assess why its per capita emissions are so disproportionate.
19. **Iceland's emissions primarily stem from industry and chemical use, followed by emissions from land transport, agriculture, and fisheries.** Much of Iceland's energy production has already been converted to renewable energy resources. In contrast, Iceland's three aluminum smelters account for 30% of Iceland's total CO₂ emissions.

Iceland's Climate Change Policies

20. **Iceland has adopted an aggressive and ambitious Climate Action Plan.** In 2020, Iceland revised its original 2018 Climate Action Plan to add 15 more action items, with a current total of 48 actions. As of October 2020, its new Climate Action Plan aims to reduce emissions by 40-46% by 2030 as compared to 2005, and to become carbon neutral by 2040.
21. **Iceland is acting jointly with the European Union and Norway to increase emissions target beyond that of the Paris Agreement.** In 2021, Iceland submitted to the UNFCCC its new NDC target of 55% net greenhouse gas emissions reduction by 2030 as compared

² Data sourced from ourworldindata.org for 2019, as compared to Sweden (4.26), Denmark (5.56), Finland (6.53), and Norway (7.89).



to 1990, an increase of 15% from its original Paris Agreement target of a 40% reduction.

22. **We commend Iceland for doubling its contribution to the UN Green Climate Fund.** Iceland announced that it will double its contribution to 2 million USD at the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit.
23. **Iceland is also pursuing adaptation strategies to address the effects of climate change.** The Icelandic Meteorological Office is undertaking research to understand and prepare for natural disasters in Iceland. Iceland is also looking to adapt economically to ice-free Arctic summers, including potential new trade routes for shipping.

DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW

24. **Iceland's Global Freedom Score has declined since the last UPR cycle, from 100/100 in 2016 to 94/100 in 2021.** Iceland's political rights score and civil liberties score each declined by 3 points.

Political Rights

25. **Iceland's Political Pluralism and Participation score decreased by 1 point.** In 2018, Freedom House found the close links between politicians and certain business sectors sufficient to exert influence over politics.
26. **Iceland's Functioning of Government score decreased by 2 points.** Iceland's Information Act has been criticized as providing insufficient safeguards, with public officials seeking to conceal embarrassing or implicating information. In 2020, the Icelandic Parliament adopted conflict-of-interest legislation and legislation protecting whistleblowers.

Civil Liberties

27. **Iceland's Freedom of Expression and Belief score decreased by 1 point.** In 2017, the Reykjavik district commissioner issued an injunction against media organisations, hampering their ability to report on the prime minister's suspicious financial transactions. This injunction was lifted in February 2018.
28. **Iceland's Rule of Law score decreased by 1 point.** Iceland has seen a rise in racist discourse in recent years. In 2019, Iceland removed an Albanian family without notice despite a pending appeal against the deportation order.
29. **Iceland's Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights score decreased by 1 point.** Iceland has failed to properly protect migrant workers against systematic exploitation from their employers.

Constitutional Issues



30. **Iceland does not give equal weight to each vote.** Voters in rural districts enjoy greater representation per vote than voters in Reykjavik and its suburbs. Statistics from the 2017 parliamentary election show that 5,350 voters are needed for a parliamentary seat in the Southwest constituency, while a parliamentary seat in the Northwest constituency requires approximately only half the number of votes, at 2,690 voters per seat. We express concern that disproportionate votes might implicate the rights of Icelanders to participate in the political process, a right protected by Articles 3 and 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iceland is a party.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

31. **We commend Iceland for ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture in 2019.**

Migrant Workers

32. **Iceland has failed to protect migrant workers against systematic exploitation.** Immigrants comprise approximately 20% of Iceland's workforce, primarily in trades and the tourism industry. Foreign workers are much more susceptible to exploitation by employers than locals, including underpayment, lack of overtime and breaks, and inhumane living conditions.
33. **Iceland has neither signed nor ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.** Despite calls from various member states to do so in the last UPR cycle in 2016, Iceland has made no progress towards formally committing to this human rights treaty. We urge Iceland to ratify this treaty.
34. **Iceland has only partially implemented the ECRI's recommendations to fight against discrimination.** We commend Iceland for passing two antidiscrimination bills pursuant to the ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 7: Act No. 85/2018 on Equal Treatment Irrespective of Racial and Ethnic Origin and Act No. 86/2018 on Equal Treatment in the Labour Market. However, in its 2020 follow-up report, the ECRI noted that Iceland did not include nationality as a protected ground against discrimination.

Asylum Seekers

35. **Iceland has a particularly low rate of refugee recognition compared to other Nordic countries.** In 2019, Iceland recognised only 6% of its total asylum decisions, while Norway at the highest recognised 41% of its total asylum decisions.
36. **Iceland has attempted to deport a group of asylum seekers to Greece amid a global pandemic.** While the 14 men had received international protection from Greece, the Council of Europe, as well as other human rights organisations such as the Red Cross and Amnesty International, has deemed living conditions in Greece to be unfit for refugees. In April 2021, after the men refused to undergo prerequisite COVID-19 testing, Iceland's



Directorate of Immigration revoked housing and food allowances from them and has denied them medical care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

37. **Specify new emissions targets related to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.** Iceland's latest announcement to the UNFCCC enhances the commitment of a joint effort to increase its emissions target to a 55% reduction by 2030 as compared to 1990 but does not identify an emissions target for Iceland individually. Furthermore, its 2020 Climate Action Plan defines emissions targets using a base year of 2005. Nonetheless, we applaud Iceland for enhancing its emissions reductions targets and encourage Iceland to continue to lead on this issue.
38. **Update its 2020 Climate Action Plan to reflect its new emissions target as announced in 2021.** The current action plan projects a 40-46% reduction in emissions by 2030 as compared to 2005 upon full implementation. Iceland should update current projected targets or develop new strategies to achieve its new emissions target as submitted to the UNFCCC. Iceland should also update its action plan to align with more specifically defined emissions targets.
39. **Prioritise action items within its climate action plan.** In particular, Iceland should emphasise researching, implementing, and scaling existing technologies such as carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS); and developing new technologies such as sustainable aluminum production.³
40. **Share its climate strategies with other small states.** We commend Iceland for undertaking a comprehensive approach to address climate change as a developed small state. Small island developing states, which are particularly vulnerable to climate change, can greatly benefit from Iceland's research and expertise.
41. **Sign and ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.**
42. **Include nationality as a protected class under the Act on Equal Treatment in the Labour Market, No. 86/2018.** Migrant workers are simultaneously particularly susceptible to exploitation and unprotected by Iceland's labour legislation. Iceland should be seeking to protect these workers, who contribute to 20% of Iceland's labour force, rather than explicitly excluding protections.
43. **Halt deportations of asylum seekers to Greece and reinstate protections for them in Iceland.** Article 36 of Iceland's Foreign Nationals Act does not generally impose an obligation to review applications for international protection if applicants have already received protection from another country. Nevertheless, the application "shall be

³ For example, Arctus Metals has been developing an aluminum production process that produces O₂ rather than CO₂ emissions.



processed” if it would result in a violation of Article 42’s principle of non-refoulement, which prevents the deportation of foreign nationals to regions where, among others, they would be “in imminent danger of being killed or subjected to inhumane or degrading treatment due to circumstances similar to those pertinent to the refugee concept.” The circumstances of Greek refugee camps are well-documented and deemed by multiple international organisations as sufficient to constitute inhumane treatment.

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This submission was prepared by Dave Inder Comar (Stanford 2001, Stanford 2002, NYU School of Law 2005) and Linda Valencia Xu (Mount Holyoke College 2016, Harvard Law School 2023).

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