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United Nations
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Photo finish between Iceland and Norway to top human development ranking

The 2007 Human Development Report says Iceland now leads annual United Nations Index

Brasilia, 27 November 2007—Iceland has narrowly passed Norway to take the top spot on the Human Development Index (HDI), according to the 2007/2008 Human Development Report (HDR) released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) today. Norway had held the number one ranking for the previous six years. This change in ranking is a result of new estimates of life expectancy and updated GDP per capita figures, stress the Report authors.

Introduced with the first HDR in 1990, the HDI assesses the state of human development through life expectancy, adult literacy and school enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary level, along with income, based on the most recent reliable data from UN partners and other official sources. Due to shifts in how countries report the statistics from which the rankings are calculated, the Index is subject to regular adjustment.

The Index analyses 2005 statistics from 175 UN member countries along with Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China) and the occupied Palestinian territories. The HDI rankings this year do not include 17 UN member nations, among them Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia, due to insufficient reliable data.

Twenty-two countries—all in sub-Saharan Africa—fall into the category of “low human development.” In ten of these countries, two children in five will not reach the age of 40; in the case of Zambia that figure rises to one child in two. By contrast, amongst the top 20 countries, only in Denmark and the United States will fewer than 9 children in ten reach the age of 60.

In most countries, including Brazil, China and India, human development has risen over the last 30 years, but some countries have shifted into reverse gear. In all, 16 countries have a lower HDI today than in 1990. Three of these countries—the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia and Zimbabwe—have lower rates of human development than they did in 1975.

Higher development, higher emissions

This year’s HDR, entitled *Fighting climate change: Human solidarity in a divided world*, which focuses on the impact of climate change on the world’s poor and vulnerable, highlights that the role of energy in human development is reflected in the record of emissions of CO₂.

According to the Report, the top 20 countries in the HDI emitted more CO₂ in 2004 than all the medium and low human development countries combined, while China and India are the largest emitters of CO₂ amongst developing countries, together they emitted less in 2004 than the top 32 countries in the HDI excluding the United States. By itself, the United States emitted almost as much as China and India combined in 2004.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT: The Human Development Report continues to frame debates on some of the most pressing challenges facing humanity. It is an independent report commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Kevin Watkins is the Lead Author of the 2007/2008 report, which includes special contributions from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil, Mayor of the City of New York Michael R. Bloomberg, Advocate for Arctic climate change Sheila Watt-Cloutier, Chair of the World Commission on Sustainable Development and former Prime Minister of Norway Gro Harlem Brundtland, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town Desmond Tutu, and the Director of the Centre for Science and Environment Sunita Narain. The Report is translated into more than a dozen languages and launched in more than 100 countries annually. Further information can be found at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008/>. The 2007/2008 Human Development Report is published in English by Palgrave Macmillan.

ABOUT UNDP: UNDP is the UN's global network to help people meet their development needs and build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working as a trusted partner with governments, civil society and the private sector to help them build their own solutions to global and national development challenges. Further information can be found at www.undp.org