



WE CAN SUCCEED

**A speech
by
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
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*The speech was delivered without notes.
This is a transcript.*

For a number of years it has been clear that in order to strengthen the process of development in the world, a dialogue with India is of fundamental importance, in addition to a dialogue with China, Brazil, and a number of other countries. Also we must try to have a dialogue with the US but a dialogue with India has many elements which could become the basis for a global program.

India is struggling with many challenges that the world faces, but its strength consists of democracy, knowledge, and science. India has vast experience and has earned respect all over the world. Thus, the conclusions which we would reach with respect to India would be applicable to other parts of the world. The India Council for Sustainable Development (ICSD) is a global exercise along these lines and it expounds on the role Indians might have to take, spending more of their time and their political energy in a dialogue with the rest of the world.

The problems and challenges faced by India constitute a significant mission. The world needs an active leadership from India – scientific and political leaders, especially the new generation of Indian political leaders, must assume responsibilities like Rajiv Gandhi did immediately after becoming Prime Minister. The young political leadership of this country can chart a course towards transforming the entire world. We need India in such a role because of its democratic traditions, credentials, and

scientific and technical knowledge. There is a lot that other countries can learn from India.

The growing cooperation between Iceland and India proves how countries in this new century, different and far apart, with different cultures, can indeed move forward and learn from each other in many productive ways. The democratic heritage of India and Iceland is indeed important; India the largest democracy on the earth and Iceland the oldest.

The important task of sustainable development has brought the world together, but it must be remembered that time flies swiftly, and all of a sudden, we will be confronted by problems that we thought might only concern future generations, definitely not our own. In less than 20 years, the climate, the conditions for life on the earth, might deteriorate so seriously that it will pose a threat to health, prosperity, and the livelihood of billions of people all over the world. The focus must now be how we respond. The latest studies indicate that we might have only 10–15 years to take the necessary action. It is high time that we do that as individuals, as nations, and as mankind. The crucial questions are: What can we do? What must we do? What can science and technology teach us?

For centuries Iceland was the poorest country in Europe; a nation of farmers and fishermen, barely surviving out there in the Atlantic. Within a lifetime of one generation we moved from being almost entirely dependent on coal to becoming a leading ‘renewable country’. There was a time when the capital of Iceland, Reykjavik, was covered in smoke emitted from coal fires. Now, 100% of the city’s electricity and heat comes from renewable resources. If Iceland could achieve this in the time of one generation, other countries can also emulate this experience.

Recently, the Chinese city of Xian Yang saw the opening of the first stage of an urban geothermal heating system. It will be the largest of its type in the world; a project initiated by cooperation between China and Iceland. It will transform the energy usage of a city of 5 million people. It will revolutionize its health system, help to eliminate diseases caused by pollution, lung diseases, asthma and other respiratory diseases that have affected the population for decades. In addition there are great economic benefits from this change in energy. This is just one example. Iceland has recently forged cooperation on clean energy projects with different parts of the world, not only in Asia, but in many parts of Europe and the US.

India has a large potential for geothermal energy. Many financial institutions have recently found that geothermal energy is by far the most profitable form of clean energy—as much as 30% more profitable than any other form of clean energy. The meeting of the Global Roundtable on

Climate Change in 2006 drew many participants from different parts of the world, including many from the largest corporations in the US, Europe, China, and India as well as influential scientists and others. The fundamental question raised in this forum was how we could change the energy usage in order to mitigate climate change and achieve sustainable development.

An agreement was signed between the University of Iceland, the Reykjavik Energy Company and leading experts and scientists from the US and Europe to develop a project of carbon sequestration. It involves taking carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and pumping it down into geothermal boreholes, where it is expected to mingle with the basalt and turn into a solid substance. If this experiment proves to be successful, it will revolutionize the possibilities of carbon sequestration in the years to come. Many parts of the world, including India, Russia, and North America, have rich deposits of basalt. These countries will then have the possibility to build carbon sequestration stations.

At another meeting – a gathering of young global leaders, who were appointed by the World Economic Forum in Davos, it was decided to meet in Iceland for discussions on how to achieve the aim of global development of clean energy usage. Many of these prominent figures from business and science, global thinkers, have concluded that Iceland could offer itself as a centre of international collaboration for the development of clean energy, not only geothermal and hydro, which we have developed in a successful way, but also wind, solar, biofuels, and others. We need a centre that can bring together all the players in the field, including investors, scientists, and policy-makers together.

The debate on whether climate change is really happening should be over. It is significant that in the Arctic region we can witness how fast climate change is happening—three times faster than anywhere else in the world. The ice that is melting there will raise sea levels in India, Pakistan, Asia, Africa, and North America. So we are all in this together. The question is: What can we do?

Perhaps climate change is not the right term; we should perhaps call it: The Future of Energy. Without the fundamental transformation of the energy system of each and every country of the world, we will not succeed. Can it be done? Can we transform the energy systems of our countries in the next 10, 15 or 20 years? The answer is that it can be done. Iceland has transformed its energy system from being over 80% dependent on coal and oil to now having 100% of electricity production from clean energy resources. Over 75% of our total energy needs are now fulfilled from clean energy resources. If Iceland could do it, so can others.

But the important thing is that scientists, technicians, public leaders, the business community have come together in order to make this happen.

We are witnessing encouraging trends in different parts of the world. Abu Dhabi will run out of oil in the next 50 or 60 years. The country has therefore decided to transform its economy from an oil-based to a clean-energy investment economy on a global basis. It is building Masdar, a green city with over 50 000 inhabitants, and with zero emissions. The national library in Singapore is a building that uses only 40% of the energy that similar buildings use. There has also been a revolution in the production of cars. Solar energy is increasingly being used to generate electricity around the world.

There are two energy resources that we have not really begun to tap. One is solar energy and the other is the enormous geothermal energy inside the earth, which we can harness with new drilling technologies. Combining these two energy sources could transform the energy system of the world. But many are frustrated by the enormity of this task. Let us then be inspired by the fact that in the previous century, we were able to deal with two world wars; get rid of colonialism; reach the Moon.

The task facing us is in fact smaller than the challenge facing the leaders of India who charted the course towards independence and prosperity. India transformed itself from a poor colony into the largest democracy in the world.