



**An Address
by
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
on receiving
The Nehru Award
Delhi
14 January 2010**

Madame President
Vice President
Prime Minister
Madame Gandhi
Ministers. Members of Parliament
Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear friends

It is with humility and deep emotion that I accept this honour, moved by the friendship of India and inspired by your trust and recognition.

In my youth, far away in the North Atlantic, Jawaharlal Nehru was a symbol of hope, a campaigner for the independence of nations and for a more harmonious and a juster world.

The people of Iceland established our Republic close to the same crossroads as India celebrated its achievements; both our midnights were then followed by brighter days.

For us, Nehru represented a new journey; proved that democracy is stronger than armed suppression, that decency is more effective than brutal force, that dialogue based on learning is for us all a brighter beacon.

In a world where oceans kept continents clearly apart and trains were the main means of transport, he truly became a global leader. His

uniqueness in this respect is demonstrated by how his message impressed the youth of a country close to the Arctic.

When I first arrived in India nearly three decades ago, to bring a bold proposal to Indira Gandhi, her response reflected not just her own but also her father's courage, his recognition that despite the challenges at home, India should and must be a force for peace and progress among all nations.

Then, the world was enslaved by the Cold War; the channels of constructive dialogue were frozen over, or non-existent; more deadly weapons were added to the stockpiles each and every day and the nuclear arms race threatened mankind with complete annihilation.

It required courage and daring to go against this current, to head for new pathways, to break the taboos of those times, to seek cooperation when in fact confrontation was the order of the day.

Indira Gandhi, and then Rajiv following her tragic death, agreed together with five other Prime Ministers and Presidents to constitute what was called the Six Nations Peace Initiative. In the 1980s this demonstrated to the world how to make a new departure, and in partnership with some of the best scientists on both sides of the Atlantic it paved the way for the arms treaties which were concluded in the wake of the Reykjavík Reagan–Gorbachev Summit. The Plan for Disarmament which Rajiv Gandhi subsequently presented at the United Nations in June 1988 was the culmination of these efforts, a forerunner of the dialogue which prevailed last autumn when the heads of the five first nuclear states came together in the Security Council.

It was my fortune in the early stages of my political life to learn profoundly from cooperation with Indira and Rajiv, to observe the skills of their officials, including Rasgotra, Chinmaya Gharekhan and Mani Shankar Aiyar, and then later to become a partner with Murli Deora in international parliamentary associations and also, in recent years, to share in the efforts of Rajendra Pachauri and Rattan Lal to prevent climate change through actions based on science.

Now, as I accept the Nehru Award here in Delhi, I ask myself: How can I best return this honour, the friendship I have enjoyed with so many Indian partners? How can I serve India, now and in the future; how can I bring the experience and the knowledge of my nation to your people?

Iceland is rich in volcanoes, geysers and glaciers, and it is home to the largest desert in Europe. The Almighty was in a festive mood when he created my country; such is the variety and the contrasts, the colours and

the activity; a powerful reminder that the Creator is still at work; that we are only guardians of Mother Earth, not her masters.

Each of these elements – the volcanoes, the geysers, the deserts and the glaciers – have made us seek science and wisdom, to build a body of learning for the benefit of others; especially now when the world faces the horrors which irreversible climate change could bring home to us all.

To offer India this wealth of knowledge would be for me an honourable mission, a service rendered to a country I have learned to love, to a people I have long admired.

The volcanoes bring in their wake earthquakes and destruction and thus an early-warning system, based on science and technology developed in my country, could help India to avert future disasters.

The geysers have led to the development of geothermal power, making Iceland the paramount clean-energy country in the world; a model our experts now want to introduce to many Indian regions.

The battle with the desert has brought advances in soil science and land use, new methods of farming, contributing to the management of our CO₂ emissions.

Our glaciers, the largest in Europe, are receding quickly. For almost a century they have constituted a field observatory for our scientific community, bringing results which could be of great relevance for the understanding of glaciers and water resources in the Himalayas.

To establish cooperation between Indian and Icelandic scientists, glaciologists and experts in the use of soil and water, together with the training of Indian students in these areas, has been in the last few years a part of my mission.

I have therefore decided to dedicate the funds associated with the Nehru Award to promoting such cooperation between India and Iceland.

I believe this to be in harmony with Nehru's service to the people of India, to the poor, to those living in the remotest regions. It is also in accord with how I can best serve your country and mine.

The future of us all, indeed of human kind, will in this new century depend on how food security is provided; water and soil will be of the essence; the glaciers provide the key.

The Himalayas have often been called the "Water Tower of Asia" and the melting of those glaciers will have profound effects on food

production in India and China and on the water-intensive economies of all the Himalayan countries.

Yet, too little is known. We lack the scientific evidence and must therefore establish effective joint research.

Here my small country can be of assistance; our scholarly community can be of service; our experience, together with that of the other Arctic nations, can perhaps be a model to follow.

During the Cold War, no region was as deeply devoid of cooperation as the Arctic, none as conclusively locked away from the theatre of joint efforts; no human contact was permitted across the boundaries of snow and blizzards. Nuclear submarines, missiles and military bases stood as emblems of how committed we were to the likelihood of armed confrontation.

When détente brought warmer relations and the Cold War came to an end, the eight countries of the Arctic – the United States, Canada, Russia and the five Nordic nations – created a framework for gradual dialogue. This framework was limited at first, focussing primarily on the environment and human development, making science and research the initial pathways.

The Arctic Council has since grown into a productive forum, rich in innovative features, bringing indigenous people and esteemed officials together in a common effort.

The Arctic Climate Assessment, and another report on Arctic Human Development, published during the Icelandic Presidency of the Council a few years ago, summarized the research conducted by hundreds of scientists from all the eight countries.

Together with the Arctic, the Himalayas are among the main ice-covered areas of the world, similarly linking large countries and small and harbouring sites where military strength has long been on display.

The countries which depend on the Himalayas for water resources, for their future food security, are the home of more than two billion people who face, in the melting of the Himalayan glaciers, a major challenge. In the coming years or decades this situation could spark off conflicts and inflame grievances across already sensitive borders. Yet there is no regional forum mandated to promote the necessary scientific and policy cooperation.

When I asked myself what I could bring to India to show my gratitude for being granted this honour, the Nehru Award, in addition to

offering the research and the technological achievements of my country, it became paramount in my mind to share with you the productive model of the Arctic Council, the scholarly, diplomatic and policy experience gathered in the last few decades by the eight Arctic countries.

The idea of a Himalayan Council, modelled on the Arctic Council where, in the 1990s, the two superpowers joined hands with smaller states, is a vision I present here today, humbly in the spirit of my long-standing friendship with India and with reference to the future of the other countries in the region.

A Himalayan Council could, like its Arctic predecessor, initially serve as a forum for the promotion of research and scientific cooperation, for a dialogue on human development, for voicing and hearing the concerns of the people who live in the mountains and witness at close hand how the changes in the water resources and the transformation of the soil cover, affect their livelihood.

The Himalayas constitute the crown of Mother Earth and link together a third of human kind. Their future is also our common fate.

It might be considered audacious, and rightly so, to arrive here in Delhi from the far-away Atlantic to bring forth such a proposal, on how the countries in the Himalayas could gradually enhance their cooperation.

My justification is derived from the efforts for which you honour me here today, from the journey I made a quarter of a century ago with my young parliamentary friends who came here to ask Indira Gandhi, and then Rajiv, to take the lead, to break the cuirass of ice created by the Cold War, to seek peace through new endeavours.

Today I pay tribute to those two visionary leaders who, in the spirit of Nehru, were bold enough to accept that mission even though it was brought to their table by a gathering of unknown young idealists.

To my fellow parliamentary friends from those fascinating days, I say now only this: This Award is also yours. Our achievement was a joint effort.

To all of you, and to the people of India, I humbly express my gratitude and my determination to serve to the best of my ability our common future.