



**Speech**  
**by**  
**Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson**  
**President of Iceland**  
**at**  
**the Icelandic National Day**  
**Shanghai EXPO 2010**

**11 September 2010**

Your Excellencies  
Ladies and gentlemen  
Dear friends

It is a great honour to be with you on the Icelandic National Day and to celebrate the great success of the Shanghai EXPO.

Friendship with China is a strong strand in Iceland's vision of the future and we are grateful for the goodwill which the people of China and your leaders, President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, have shown towards my country. Everywhere we go in China, we find that people have heard of Iceland and know about our beautiful nature: the volcanoes and the glaciers, geysers and green valleys, lakes and rivers; how the ever-changing light brings out the contrasts in the landscape.

In recent years, many Chinese people have visited Iceland, and we hope to see more and more in the years to come, hope that the success of the Icelandic pavilion will make Chinese people determined to travel to Iceland and to enjoy its unique natural attractions.

I assure you here today, the people of China: You will be welcomed as friends, welcomed to a country which is open and safe, the youngest country on Earth, where creation is still taking place.

Our nature has also influenced our culture, our artists, our design, our music and our painters – all of which is on display here in Shanghai.

Iceland's pavilion is inspired by water and energy, two resources essential to 'Better Cities. Better Life'. Yes, we are blessed with enormous reservoirs of water; water in a variety of forms: fresh water in lakes and rivers, sea water rich in fish stocks, frozen water in our glaciers, the largest glaciers in Europe.

Iceland is rich not only in fresh and frozen water but also in hot water, geothermal springs and underground geothermal resources. In the last 50 years, we have learned to harness this rich resource of geothermal water so now, with the help of hydropower, Iceland has become the No. 1 clean-energy country in the world.

When I was young, over 80% of Iceland's energy came from imported coal and oil. Now, the heating systems in our towns and cities are 100% based on clean energy sources, primarily geothermal, and 100% of our electricity is also derived from clean energy reserves.

It has become an important dimension in my country's new international vision how to share our clean energy experience and technologies with China and other countries, especially in the developing world. The economic benefits from our geothermal and hydropower developments have been enormous, helping us to transform a country of farmers and fishermen into one of the most prosperous welfare economies in the world, even despite the recent financial crisis.

The beauty of geothermal power for economic and social development is that it is not just an energy resource. It can also be used for greenhouse cultivation and other types of productive farming to help rural areas to grow products for high-priced markets. It can provide warm water for spas and clay for cosmetic treatments, offer urban and rural recreational and health centres, bringing lifestyle benefits to the local people.

The scale of our national savings from replacing imported oil with geothermal energy in urban space heating is demonstrated by the fact that every ten years, Iceland saves what amounts to one year's entire GNP by not having to import oil to heat its houses.

Ours has indeed been a revolutionary transformation, not only allowing my nation to build an economy with inherent long-term strength, but also to make significant contributions to the rest of the world.

Icelandic power companies and engineering firms have participated in geothermal projects in China and India, in East Africa and Central

America, in Western and Eastern Europe, in the Middle East, in Russia and the United States.

Our experience provides China with new opportunities to adopt successful economic strategies based on geothermal development.

The State Visit of the President of China, Jiang Zemin, to Iceland in 2002 was indeed a landmark event in our energy cooperation. I vividly remember how excited President Jiang Zemin became when I took him to the Nesjavellir Geothermal Power Plant, built by Reykjavík Energy, about an hour's drive outside the capital and close to our historic national park at Thingvellir. When he left the plant, he was clearly in high spirits, telling me that he had acquired a new vision for the clean energy future of China.

This same vision has inspired the meetings I have been privileged to have in recent years with President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, and also my discussion a few days ago with Vice-President Xi Jinping, when he declared that the Chinese Government now sees Iceland as its primary partner in the geothermal transformation of China, bringing clean energy to cities and regions all over the country.

Such a transformation could help China to gain a leading global position in the field of clean energy. Together with progress in solar, wind, hydroelectric and other forms of clean energy, geothermal development in China in the next 10-20 years could enable it to become the No. 1 clean-energy country among the major economic powers, surpassing even the European Union, the United States and Japan.

It will be both an honour and a privilege for Iceland to help China to achieve such a success, and thus remove the coal and smoke from Chinese cities and bring healthier life and growing prosperity to your people.

Our cooperation will also extend to other areas. Both China and Iceland are earthquake countries and therefore the people of Iceland felt a special sympathy for the victims of the recent earthquakes in China, for their families and their communities.

In my visit now, I have discussed how Chinese and Icelandic scientists and experts could cooperate on earthquake monitoring and rescue plans, how to minimize the destruction caused by future earthquakes.

Our scientific communities can also cooperate on glacial research, how the glaciers in my country and the glaciers in China, the Himalayas, which are often called the Third Pole, are receding, illustrating the threat

of irreversible climate change, with grave consequences for the oceans and the water systems of the world.

Yes, water is indeed on display in the Icelandic Pavilion in Shanghai, showing how it allows us to aim together for a clean-energy future. Our message is that we must make sure that water remains a blessing, that the energy derived from geothermal resources can bring a clean air to China, that water in its many forms should be the core of our celebrations next year when China and Iceland hail the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our diplomatic relations.

I thank the Government of China, the City of Shanghai, the organizers of EXPO, and the millions of Chinese people who visit the Icelandic pavilion, for your friendship. We are deeply grateful and pleased to be with you today.