



**A Speech
by
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at
the opening of
The Arctic Circle Assembly
Reykjavik
12 October 2013**

Your Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen
Dear friends

I welcome you all to the first Assembly of the Arctic Circle, a new venue for a constructive and open dialogue on the Arctic, the Northern Region which in recent years has become a new global playing field of scientific, economic, political and environmental cooperation.

We are profoundly honoured that more than 1,000 participants from over 40 countries have come to the Assembly. We thank each and every one who in recent months has helped to create the Arctic Circle and thus contributed to enhancing and widening the democratic dialogue that has become the hallmark of Arctic cooperation.

The Arctic Council has evolved into the core of our endeavours, supported by numerous organisations, associations and institutions devoted to Arctic issues. In recent years countries beyond the Arctic, in Europe and Asia, have confirmed the increasing global significance of the Region and their legitimate concerns were a few months ago formally recognized by the Ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council in Kiruna.

From now on, in the coming years, the ten largest economies in the world will be represented in one way or another at the Arctic table.

As we move forward with these new partners, with wide-ranging issues coming up on the Arctic agenda, it is of the utmost importance to maintain the essence and the well-established qualities of our

cooperation, which both the Arctic Council and a multitude of Arctic organisations, institutions and associations have helped to develop.

Three of these are especially relevant:

First. To maintain the culture of an open dialogue and informal style of deliberation and the enduring personal friendships and mutual respect which have made the Arctic Council and other Arctic venues so successful in recent years. When new partners arrive on the scene, perhaps used to more formalized and bureaucratic diplomatic encounters, it is important that they adjust to our productive and practical Arctic culture.

Second. The pre-eminent role of science and research in Arctic policy-making must be maintained. Knowledge, based on expert advice and scientific projects, has been the foundation of our decisions and a guiding principle in making Arctic cooperation so successful. Respect for the facts and scientific evidence has been more important than displays of political and economic power.

Third. In the dialogue within the Arctic Council, indigenous peoples and their organisations and representatives have been a significant part of the process, emphasizing an open and democratic approach to our common Arctic future. No other international cooperation among states has in recent years been so respectful of indigenous peoples, their traditions and interests.

These three dimensions have been of key importance in the success of Arctic cooperation and must be maintained effectively in the coming years. They are to some extent the “Arctic House Rules” which I am sure our new visitors and partners will gladly respect.

It was in anticipation of the new global importance of the Arctic that a few of us, who in the previous decade had become friends and partners in the Arctic dialogue, started two years ago to seek for ways to enhance and strengthen the wide-ranging Arctic networks, to bring together, at least once a year, the various constituent elements of Arctic participation – scientists, policy makers, activists, entrepreneurs, indigenous representatives and many others – in a broad venue where everyone would be welcome, where all would be on the same level, where we could debate and discuss, be informed and ask questions; an instrument – or should we now say an orchestra – created not only by us but also by each and every one who decided to come along.

The first Assembly of the Arctic Circle, which we open here today, brings this vision into reality and I would like to thank the numerous

participating organisations, and those who have organized the many breakout sessions in their own name and according to their own agenda; enhancing our gathering without surrendering their own identity and decision-making authority.

Thus, the Arctic Circle becomes like a village where everyone can participate and each voice will be heard, where the warmth of human dialogue paves the way to success in one of the toughest environments on Mother Earth.

This morning my special thanks go to my partners who, a year ago, came together through bonds of friendship to work towards the establishment of the Arctic Circle: To Alice Rogoff, the publisher of the Alaska Dispatch and the founder of the Arctic Imperative; to Kuupik Kleist, who served with distinction as the Prime Minister of Greenland; to Artur Chilingarov, an explorer and leader of Russian Arctic endeavours; to Senator Lisa Murkowski, a visionary on Arctic issues in the US Congress; to Prince Albert II who in the tradition of Albert I has become an important voice on the Arctic future; to Dr. Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber who, although he comes from a faraway region, saw clearly the connection between a clean energy future and the sustainability of the Arctic, and to Scott Borgerson, a thinker and entrepreneur.

There are, of course, many others who deserve to be mentioned, including the staff who have worked miracles in recent weeks, but primarily, thanks are due to all of you who have assembled here today from so many countries, bringing a multitude of disciplines, expertise and endeavours to our common journey.

Your presence here today confirms that we are witnessing a historic transformation. The Arctic, once remote and unknown, is becoming the core of our 21st century global concerns, a new territory which will test our ability for constructive cooperation.

On behalf of the people of Iceland, I welcome especially those who have travelled from afar. We are indeed proud to host the first Assembly of the Arctic Circle in our country, in the northernmost capital of the world.

With these words I welcome you again and introduce the message from the Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon to the Arctic Circle, an important statement in support of our effort which we very much welcome; and I then ask Alice Rogoff to chair the Opening Session.