



**A speech
by the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at the opening of
the Arctic Circle Second Assembly**

**Reykjavík
31 October 2014**

Mr. President
Prime Minister
Ministers
Ambassadors
Excellencies
Dear friends

I welcome you all to the Second Assembly of the Arctic Circle, a gathering for dialogue and discussions, a forum for wide-ranging and dynamic international cooperation on the future of the Arctic.

When we launched the Arctic Circle last year, it was endorsed with constructive engagement by governments of Arctic states and leading powers in Europe and Asia, by institutions of science and research, large corporations and environmental organizations, indigenous communities, concerned activists and citizens alike.

The fundamental principle of the Arctic Circle is to invite all partners to convene sessions in their own name and with full authority over the agenda and the selection of speakers. This is the hallmark of our common endeavour, presenting both a democratic spirit and a vision of inclusion and equality.

As at the First Assembly, we welcome here today at the opening of the Second Assembly more than 1400 participants from about 40

countries, consolidating the Arctic Circle as the most comprehensive international gathering on the Arctic.

We have gained strength and support from the engagement of so many, and your enthusiasm, response, and cooperation have enabled us to consolidate the Assembly of the Arctic Circle as a permanent annual event here in Harpa; transforming Reykjavík every October in the years to come into a dynamic Arctic village where anyone with a view can make their voice heard.

In addition, the Arctic Circle Secretariat, in cooperation with our Advisors and Partners, is already planning separate Arctic Circle Forums in other countries; smaller in size, with their focus on specific agendas and approaches. Hopefully, we will see such Forums hosted next year in Greenland, the United States, and Singapore.

We are profoundly grateful to our partner organizations, both for their financial support and also for their intellectual and substantive input, ideas, proposals and practical suggestions. Their goodwill and positive engagement is the key to the success of the Arctic Circle, once again manifesting the positive spirit of Arctic cooperation.

I also express my warmest thanks to the young people who have led our Secretariat with such dedication and fine-tuned diplomacy. It has been an extraordinary challenge to align this diverse and distinguished gathering within a comprehensive programme; to organise these highly active three days. Their work is a testimony to the professionalism of our new generation.

Some have noted that the sessions are indeed many, that the scope of our agenda is overwhelming, but the multitude of topics reflects the growing complexities of the Arctic debate, the increasing number of active partners and the profound challenges facing the Arctic and the entire world.

The Northern regions, which for centuries were isolated and remote, have now become a global theatre reflecting the economic, political and environmental importance of the Arctic.

If a few years ago some were surprised by the new term ‘The Global Arctic’, they now only have to look around in this magnificent hall and see how representatives from all these countries are participating in dialogues and discussions, in every meeting room, large and small, both in Harpa and facilities in nearby buildings; also using the balconies and public spaces for extensive networking activities.

Thanks to the people who run Harpa on a daily basis, we can indeed transform this extraordinary building, crowned by European architectural prizes, into a true Arctic village, strengthening the foundation of our cooperation and partnerships, working together towards a sustainable future, not only for the Arctic but also for Planet Earth.

I hope that when the Assembly closes on Sunday evening, we will all be richer in experience, knowledge and wisdom, looking forward to meeting again in Harpa in the years to come, when every October the northernmost capital of the world will become a fascinating international Arctic location.

With these words I welcome you again, and ask my good friend and Arctic Circle partner Alice Rogoff to chair the opening sessions.