



**A Speech by  
the President of Iceland  
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson  
at a State Banquet given by  
the President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam  
during a State Visit to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam  
Hanoi  
4 November 2015**

Your Excellency President Truong Tan Sang  
and Madame Mai Thi Hanh  
Distinguished guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a profound honour for me and my country, for my delegation and the people of Iceland, to be so warmly received on the first State Visit by a President of Iceland to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

It is also a moving personal journey, bringing back the memories of the solidarity with the people of Vietnam which I, as a young student, and others of my generation in Europe and the Western world demonstrated to support your struggle against foreign oppression, your fight for freedom and full independence of your country.

The Vietnam War, as we call it in the West, formed our political vision, moulded new forms of political campaigns, gave our culture a global vision which later became our guiding light in dealing with international challenges. The demonstrations and the protests were the testing grounds of our determination.

For me, Mr. President, to be received here today so warmly and to honour, on behalf of my nation, the success and the progress of Vietnam is an illustration of how the ideas and the commitment of the young can bring us in advanced years to witness historic achievements.

I was also privileged, two decades ago, to visit Vietnam, a few years before becoming President, helping pioneers from the Icelandic business and entrepreneurial communities to build bridges to the growing

economic development of your country. In a meeting in Ho Chi Min City I then presented the leaders of the People's Council with a book in Icelandic written by one of our distinguished political editors about the heroic struggle of your people.

Thus I stand here now not only to honour the achievements of modern Vietnam, but also to pay my respects on behalf of my generation who, as students and young campaigners, took to the streets to support your heroic struggle, declaring the end of imperial centuries, to proclaim the dawn of a new era where every nation is free to govern itself.

The people of Iceland profoundly understood your desire for independence, the vision of economic and social progress for all. For centuries we were the poorest nation in Europe, farmers and fishermen seeking survival from the resources of the land and the ocean.

Our campaign for independence lasted one hundred years, but unlike yours it was blessed in being conducted exclusively by peaceful means, through political meetings, periodicals, newspapers, petitions and other democratic endeavours. No lives were lost; no one was imprisoned.

When our Republic was founded in 1944 it signalled, however, a revolutionary transformation in Europe: never before had a nation so small claimed to become a fully independent state, placing its future entirely in the hands of its people.

Now in this new century we can celebrate the results brought by decades of development, giving my people economic opportunities, education and health care, creating one of the highest living standards in the world.

In my visit we are honoured to share with the people of Vietnam some of our most productive practices, know-how and technologies, especially in advancing a modern, effective and profitable fishing industry, based on sustainable use of ocean resources and sophisticated innovations – and also how to use the heat stored in the grounds of our countries to build green energy systems, especially in cities and towns. This can harness the geothermal potential of Vietnam for use in multiple enterprises, not just in producing electricity and heat or air conditioning, but also in new forms of greenhouse agriculture and fish farming, spas and various medical and health facilities.

In the creative sectors of Icelandic high-tech and information technology there are also innovations and products which can make a significant contribution to your progress.

All of this will consolidate the foundation of our cooperation. That was my vision when I first came to Vietnam and which I am now proud to bring into being.

Furthermore, in recent years we have witnessed a growing involvement by Asian countries in the future of the northernmost part of the world, the Arctic territories and oceans which are Iceland's northern neighbourhood.

Last month in our capital, Reykjavik, the annual Assembly of the Arctic Circle was attended by distinguished delegations from China, Japan, Korea and Singapore who joined 2,000 delegates from 50 countries to discuss the future of the Arctic, the opening of new sea routes linking Asia to Europe and America through the North as well as responsible use of the vast resources available throughout the Arctic region.

With the growing significance of Vietnam in the global economy we hope that your country, Mr President, will also soon join other Asian partners in this new dialogue and cooperation on the Arctic.

Thus, the new century offers our nations rich opportunities, multiple avenues for constructive cooperation, bringing into reality the dreams of the young activists who, half a century ago, linked arms across continents in a global campaign for a new era of freedom, independence and international solidarity.

I thank you, Mr President, for the friendship you have shown towards my country and ask all distinguished guests to raise your glasses to the honour of the President of Vietnam, Truong Tan Sang, and Madame Mai Thi Hanh, and to the cooperation between the people of Vietnam and Iceland.