



**A Speech
by
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at a State Banquet
given by
the President of Singapore
Tony Tan Keng Yam
during a State Visit**

**Singapore
11 November 2015**

Your Excellency President Tony Tan
and Mrs. Tan
Excellencies
Distinguished Guests

In the year when Singapore celebrates the 50th Anniversary of Independence it is a profound honour to be the first President of my country to make a State Visit to Singapore.

We are both island nations, our Republics young, the ocean the foundation of our economic progress, the well-being of our people.

Although distance was for decades a barrier to our co-operation, the new century has now given our bonds a visionary significance, due to the growing importance of the Northern regions of our planet and the increasing global role of the Arctic, opening new routes for shipping between Asia and Europe and North America.

Singapore's experience, knowledge and insights can provide valuable guidance for the future success of the Arctic. Therefore, a few years ago, the nations of the Arctic welcomed Singapore to the Arctic Council as an observer state. Your country has also, since the foundation

of the Arctic Circle, participated actively in its annual Assemblies in Reykjavík and is now hosting, during my State Visit, the Second Arctic Circle Forum.

This signifies indeed a fundamental global transformation and here tonight, Your Excellency, I thank Singapore for its constructive engagement in the Arctic and express the hope that the evolution of Arctic co-operation will continue to benefit from your contributions.

Singapore has built its historic success through the education of Your people, by a comprehensive and strong national vision and the determination to make your geographical location a central advantage in the growing global economy, transforming distance from far-away continents into tight network of productive co-operation.

As in my country, you have also learned to harness the oceans, utilising them for growing economic connections as well as the richness of their resources. As island nations we can both bring important lessons to the challenges facing the world when pollution and environmental degradation increasingly threaten the future health of the oceans. Their significance for our planet needs to be given the highest of priorities on the global agenda. In that endeavour our co-operation and example can be of fundamental importance, giving our dialogue, in addition to our Arctic partnership, a crucial global dimension.

In my visit I also offer to Your country the Icelandic model of clean energy transformation. A number of decades ago, we moved away from oil and coal to base the Icelandic energy system entirely on green, renewable resources for all our electricity production and house heating. In this field and others, including marine technologies and processing machinery, Icelandic partners would be honoured to develop co-operation with Singapore, bringing our know-how to Your ambitious vision of a sustainable future.

I have, Your Excellency, throughout my life of public service, indeed since my student days, admired the vision and the leadership of Singapore, seen in Your progress an example for my country and other island nations; the proof that despite centuries of poverty and oppression a small country, surrounded by the ocean, and, at the beginning of its progress, far away from the centres of world economic power, can indeed achieve extraordinary success, becoming a model for others.

On this great anniversary of Your independence, I congratulate the people of Singapore and thank Your Excellency for the honour You have bestowed on my country. The co-operation and friendship between Singapore and Iceland is not just of importance to our countries; it also

signifies a fundamental global transformation, highlights how new partnerships are constructively created in the 21st century.

Our joint journey will be further enhanced by our dialogue earlier today and by our Arctic discussions tomorrow.

May I, therefore, Your Excellency, ask all the distinguished guests to rise and lift their glasses in Your honour and to celebrate the friendship of our peoples.