



Speech
by the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at the Arctic Circle Greenland Forum
Nuuk
17 May 2016

Premier of Greenland
Representatives of States and Governments
Leaders of indigenous organizations
Participants from science, business, research
and environmental organizations
Dear friends

The opening of the Arctic Circle Greenland Forum, with more than 350 participants from 20 countries, confirms that since its foundation a few years ago the Arctic Circle has become the most wide-ranging network of Arctic dialog and cooperation.

Together with the large annual Assemblies in Iceland, and the first two Forums in Alaska and Singapore, the Greenland Forum presents our vision and determination to bring to the people of the Arctic a brighter future, while sharing with others the global responsibility for the sustainability of the Arctic and our planet.

I thank the Government of Greenland for its constructive and enthusiastic partnership in the organization of the Forum, for its insight into which issues and challenges should acquire priority on our agenda, how the program here in Nuuk should reflect the most promising areas of economic progress as well as important frameworks for the empowerment of the people, the fulfillment of their hopes.

It has been my privilege as president to witness the democratic advancement of the people of Greenland, and our cooperation in the preparation of this Arctic Circle Forum in Nuuk has confirmed my conviction that together, we have indeed entered a new era. Greenland, which like my own country, Iceland, was for centuries remote from

leading countries and continents, is now center-stage in the global vision of how the Arctic must play a crucial role in the future of our planet.

When the Arctic Council was established following the end of the Cold War, tension and the military confrontation were replaced by a journey in cooperation. Previously hostile countries came to the same table, determined to map out step by step how constructive dialog, research and cooperation, could guide the future of the Arctic. The indigenous people and their organizations acquired an important role in this process and in this, Greenland and its leaders provided inspiring influence.

As we progressed into the 21st century, the need for a wider, more informal, completely open and democratic platform where everyone could join in the discussion, presenting their projects and ideas, became clear to many, and thus we came together three years ago to establish the Arctic Circle with the mission to strengthen the role of the people and support the Arctic Council and all the authorities responsible for Arctic affairs.

The growing involvement of countries outside the Arctic, leading states in Europe and Asia, as well as their institutions and enterprises, was also a key component in the creation of the Arctic Circle. The annual Assemblies have confirmed the wisdom of this arrangement. In the first three years, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and many others have actively participated in the Assemblies, presented their contribution and projects in both plenary and specialized sessions.

This global dimension of the Arctic Circle was also evident in the Forum in Alaska in August last year and even more so in the Forum in Singapore in November. Now, in Nuuk, we are also witnessing this Asian and European presence; a global engagement in addition to the participation by Arctic states.

It is also highly significant that the Greenland Forum welcomes strong delegations from the neighboring countries to the east and the west of Greenland. Within the Arctic geographical structure, Canada, Greenland, and Iceland form a logical neighborhood within which economic and social progress can be furthered by close cooperation. These three countries are close enough to make cooperation in many fields both practical and advantageous.

As Greenland works to advance in the areas outlined by Premier Kim Kielsen in his opening speech, the involvement of partners from the two neighboring countries, Canada and Iceland, can lead to successful

results. The logistics of air traffic, sea transport, tourism, infrastructure connections and experience in the sustainable use of natural resources all make the vision of such tripartite cooperation among these Arctic neighbors both practical and positive.

I therefore welcome warmly the strong participation by Canada and Iceland in this Arctic Circle Greenland Forum and thank the Premier of Québec, Philippe Couillard, and his Administration as well as other Canadian partners for their engagement in making the Greenland Forum a success. I am also very pleased to see so many delegates from Iceland; officials, business leaders, heads of universities, experts, entrepreneurs and others.

I also wish to acknowledge the presence of distinguished participants from the United States who, once again, have demonstrated their commitment to the successful future of the Arctic by joining forces with us here in Nuuk.

This Forum is, however, primarily dedicated to the people of Greenland. It is a testimony to the important role of Greenland and how constructive Arctic and global cooperation can strengthen the prosperity and the welfare of the people of Greenland; how the advance of this country can serve as a model for other Arctic regions as well as for other parts of the world where indigenous inhabitants claim their right to determine their own future.

Greenland is half the size of Western Europe, the largest territory in the Arctic where the people have acquired constitutional self-government and can thus to a large extent determine their own future.

By hosting the Arctic Circle Forum here in Nuuk the Government of Greenland sends an important signal to us all; issuing a broad invitation to constructive engagement in the spirit of mutual interest in the success of the Arctic and its people.

The Arctic Circle is honored to be thus a part of this journey, to join Greenland in hosting this Forum, the largest international gathering on the Arctic ever to be held in Greenland. The Forum can in many ways become the foundation of further progress. Within the Arctic Circle, there is a willingness to continue this cooperation and plan for regular Arctic Circle Greenland Forums which would take place every second or third year and thus, together with the annual Assemblies in Iceland and Forums in other countries, strengthen our shared global platform.

The program here in Nuuk reflects a new direction in the areas of economic progress, investment and finance. Instead of emphasizing a few

large industrial projects, mining and fossil fuel production, our attention will be on gradual progress in the evolution of air transport and cargo shipping, modern tourism based on the growing global interest in the unique nature of the North, the utilization of ocean resources and other areas of economic progress which can be developed on the basis of existing opportunities, directed by the policy to empower the inhabitants and serve their economic and social interests.

We will also examine how new Arctic financial structures, with international involvement, will further investments and help to coordinate infrastructure projects across the Arctic in order to establish a viable pan-Arctic system. In this respect, the coordinated vision and involvement of Canadian, Greenlandic and Icelandic partners is especially relevant, given our geographic locations and shared interests and experiences. This geographical tripartite dimension will, of course, be strengthened by the participation of partners from other Arctic states and countries in Europe, Asia and other parts of the world.

Therefore it is important that we will, during the Forum, benefit from the perspective of distinguished European and Asian participants who will share with us their vision of a successful Arctic future.

The development of the Arctic regions is, however, not only about economic progress. Education and health are also crucial components in our lives; the well-being of the people and the education of new generations of utmost priority.

These crucial dimensions will be discussed both in sessions in the Culture House and also when, on the final day, we move to the University of Greenland, where research, innovation and the role of Arctic universities will be on the agenda.

I want to thank the University of Greenland for its contribution to the Forum and hope that together we can build a dynamic and forward-looking educational network across the Arctic, giving the young generation the conviction that they can enjoy a shared future, rooted in their home regions and strengthened by global engagement.

The Arctic Circle Greenland Forum will thus in multiple ways serve to demonstrate an advanced engagement by the inhabitants of the Arctic, how they can, in cooperation with partners from other countries, near and far, now seek paths in economic and social progress, strengthen the infrastructure of their communities and enjoy good education and health services for all.

The Forum consolidates the new dimension of the Arctic Circle, to create, in addition to the large international Assemblies each October, platforms in different parts of the world, where specific aspects of the Arctic future can be extensively discussed and new dimensions examined and explored.

The Greenland Forum is also a certain milestone in the global engagement of the indigenous people of the Arctic and it is both an honor and privilege for the Arctic Circle to join the Government of Greenland in this important endeavor.

We are thus determined to build a strong foundation for our cooperation and a sustainable and successful future for the people across the Arctic, acutely aware of the new global significance of this Northernmost part of our planet.

I hope all of you feel inspired to be a part of this fascinating journey and your presence here today is a testimony to your commitment to creating a new Arctic epoch.