



Speech
By the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
At a Gala Dinner
In Narsarsuaq, Greenland
16 July 2000

Your Majesty
Your Royal Highness
Mr. Premier
Friends in Greenland
Ladies and Gentlemen

Together we have paid tribute to a great history, a milestone in man's quest for new lands, new vision, new wisdom.

With the reconstruction of these ancient relics we salute the settlers who established a new community here in Greenland, adopted Christianity and first informed Europe about the great continent of America.

The Sagas of Icelanders, written on calfskin by literary craftsmen, present us with accounts of the lives and fates of the people who moved to Greenland, mostly from communities around the bays of Breiðarfjörður and Faxaflói in west Iceland – accounts of their struggles against adversity and harsh conditions, and also of their triumphs and achievements.

In this year of major celebrations, which marks the twin millennium of the adoption of Christianity by Iceland's parliament and the discovery of America by Leif the Lucky, the Icelanders have established a wide range of collaboration with our kinsmen and friends in the Nordic countries, the USA and Canada.

Yet in our view one of the milestones this year is the cooperation with our friends in Greenland on the reconstruction of Eirik the Red's farmhouse and the church named after his wife Thjodhild.

I would like to convey to the Greenland Home Rule and people of Greenland here tonight my warm thanks from the Icelanders for this unique cooperation and for your fine invitation to celebrate with you the history that links us together forever.

At the splendid Viking exhibition which opened in Washington this spring, I was delighted to see how thoroughly it highlighted Greenland's important role in the remarkable history of the discovery of the New World. To tell the truth, we Icelanders, and the Norwegians too, have long been rather keen to monopolise the honour of these ancient deeds. The time had certainly come to put such rivalry aside and welcome the Greenlanders to join the club! And that we have certainly done during these wonderful days here.

I convey to the Greenland Home Rule and the Greenland nation my most heartfelt thanks and those of everyone in Iceland for your initiative and leadership in honouring the memory of remarkable explorers, those people who a thousand years ago forged mighty bonds that join Iceland and Greenland.

I would like to thank Her Majesty Queen Margrethe and His Royal Highness Prince Henrik for their splendid hospitality and marvellous company. We Icelanders have always treasured Her Majesty's warm feelings and friendship towards our nation.

I ask our honourable guests to rise from their seats and salute Her Majesty, His Royal Highness, the Greenland nation and all the remarkable people who a thousand years ago gave this site its rightful and lasting place in history.