



**Address**  
**by the President of Iceland**  
**Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson**  
**on Íslendingadagur in Gimli**  
**7 August 2000**

Distinguished Icelandic-Canadians  
Dear friends and fellow countrymen

What a joy to be with you again and celebrate the heritage which binds us together.

The spirit of Iceland remains strong amongst you and in this historic year we have seen our relations acquire new dimensions.

When I spoke to you on this platform in 1997, a year after taking office, I reiterated the promise given in my first inaugural address to create active bonds between all those who share in the unique heritage which over the centuries has enriched the Icelandic people.

I reported to you on that splendid day three years ago that there was now in Iceland a new awareness of the need to give priority to the relationship with our relatives in Canada, to build on our shared history an extensive modern cooperation which could provide new generations with a deep sense of personal roots.

I described eight proposals, projects, events and active forms of cooperation which in the years ahead would bring new impetus and enhanced value, new vitality and even greater strength to the relationship between us in Iceland and our relatives and friends in Canada, a new beginning which would strengthen the sense of family among all people of Icelandic descent.

It was indeed a part of my mandate to offer the service of the Icelandic Presidency to you all.

Today we can rejoice in how many of these ideas have led to action and how at the opening of the new century the Icelandic-Canadian heritage has been given a new sense of direction and support.

Together with Canada we are celebrating the thousandth anniversary of the journey of discovery which enabled the Icelandic explorers to make Europe for the first time aware of this great continent.

We have presented the statue of Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir, the mother of the first Icelandic and European child born in North America, to the Canadian people as a symbolic gift, representing the heritage and history shared by our countries.

We have sent the Viking ship Íslendingur from the birthplace of Leifur Eiríksson in Dalasýsla, West Iceland, across the Atlantic Ocean to the shores of Canada where the first Icelandic settlement was established when the millennium which is now ending was in its early years.

We have initiated the Snorri Programme, named after Guðríður's son, the child who in a unique way symbolises the ties between Iceland and Canada, in order to bring young Canadians of Icelandic descent to the country of their foremothers and forefathers, to enable them to experience at first hand the culture and the nature of the old country, to seek their roots in a personal way and meet their extended families.

We have published the ancient Sagas of Icelanders and new books on the Icelandic settlers in Canada in order to make our joint historical and cultural legacy available to you all in English.

We have provided financial help for the new heritage centre here in Gimli and for the teaching of the Icelandic language at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, sent artists and scholars to visit the Icelandic communities all over Canada and thus attempted to make a further contribution to your own splendid efforts.

The arrival of Svavar Gestsson and his wife Guðrún to Winnipeg as the first permanent and professional diplomatic representative of Iceland in Canada was indeed a landmark decision, to be followed by the establishment of a formal Icelandic embassy in Canada in the very near future. It is indeed appropriate here today to thank both Svavar and Guðrún for their excellent work, their contribution to bringing our relations to a new level of activity and excellence.

The Heritage Museum in Hofsvík in Northern Iceland has been extended and now provides visitors with a unique insight into the Icelandic migration to Canada. In addition, regional museums in different parts of Iceland now provide exhibitions dedicated to the lives of local people who moved to Canada.

Furthermore, the opportunities for entrepreneurs and business leaders, innovators and young people with ideas for commercial and technical cooperation will be greatly helped by the forthcoming free trade agreement between Iceland and Canada within the EFTA framework and also by more frequent air connections between our countries.

Taken together these advances, projects, events and decisions constitute monumental progress, and on this festive occasion today I want to thank all who have contributed to this achievement. Without the help of numerous people we would not have succeeded in this splendid way. The participation by the Icelandic-Canadian community in these efforts has given us both encouragement and strength to continue to make further progress.

It is with pleasure and pride that we can celebrate today the success of our joint efforts. This shows once again the value of the words which the Icelanders cherish, that family is the foremost of our duties and endeavours.

I salute here today the people who despite danger and difficult journeys were determined to preserve their Icelandic roots in this new country. They were true to their culture and enriched it even further by giving the Icelandic nation new visions, poems and texts, treasures in the language of the home country which have become the music of the Icelandic soul.

Þó þú langförull legðir  
sérhvert land undir fót,  
bera hugur og hjarta  
samt þín heimalands mót.

This patriotic poem by Stephan G. Stephansson, the great Icelandic-Canadian poet of the Rocky Mountains, was sung only a few days ago at my second inauguration to the Presidency of Iceland, as it indeed was at the first. Composed in Canada more than a century ago, it signifies at the opening of the new millennium our true feelings for our beautiful and unique country.

May his words be our guidance and our blessing.

May the success we have achieved be the signpost for further advances.

I thank you again for your friendship and your splendid reception. It fills me with joy to be with you again.