



**Address by
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at the opening of
the 33rd Scandinavian Neurology Congress and
the 2nd Scandinavian Congress of Neurological Nursing
29 May 2002**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Nordic nations have widely become a symbol of excellence in health care and regarding the concern shown to those in need, the sick, the disadvantaged and people who have lost the ability to control their own lives.

We pride ourselves on the progress we have made in general welfare and on the informed understanding and sympathy we demonstrate towards those suffering from mental diseases. We believe that our communities are among the most enlightened in the world.

Certainly the Nordic achievements are considerable when compared with the situation prevailing in most parts of the world, but we should also acknowledge that we have a long way to go, there are improvements to be made in many fields and the fate of those who suffer can be at times almost inhuman.

Profound progress has been made in modern times in the treatment and care of those who become mentally ill for a shorter or a longer time and the Nordic countries have in many ways been in the forefront of this progress but we still need to evaluate our future course of action in an open and honest way.

Although Nordic doctors and nurses are active participants in international forums and scientific cooperation in this field there is a clear advantage in regularly coming together in a Nordic setting to examine our progress and consolidate the Nordic contribution to the international cooperation.

It is in this spirit that we welcome the Scandinavian Neurological Congress and the Congress of Neurological Nursing to Iceland and hope that the openness of the scenery and the creativity of the natural forces here will be conducive to effective discussions.

The continuous activity and unpredictability of the forces which for centuries have shaped our country have in many ways effected our souls. Volcanic eruptions, flows of burning lava, the geysers and earthquakes are continuously bringing fire and heat into contact with the ice of the glaciers and the transparency of cool rivers and lakes. To endure in such a country can test the limits of one's sanity, but if we survive our sensitivity has been enhanced beyond description.

To find harmony with nature and consequently within ourselves is a gift which Iceland bestows upon both its people and our honoured friends. The landscape leaves no one untouched and the spirit in the air can be both challenging and enriching.

I hope that this unique setting will give your deliberations a special dimension and your important tasks an extra cutting edge.

In a world typified by growing tension in our daily lives, the health of our minds will be of ever growing importance. Despite the progress in recent years there is still much we do not know and our journey will continue to be clouded by darkness. The treatment of the sick must be aided by a better understanding and greater tolerance in society at large. Despite our Nordic achievements we still have a lot to do.

Recent studies have shown that our way of life, the food we eat, regular exercise and harmonious relationships at the workplace and in the home all affect our mental health. Many illnesses can be prevented or treatment made easier if healthy lifestyles become the prevailing norm. It is therefore of great importance to inform and educate people about how these factors can influence our mental health. In this respect we need to bring together experts from many fields.

It is therefore significant that your conferences are dedicated to cooperation between doctors and nurses in order to broaden the scope of the discussions. The segmentalization of those with different training within the hospitals and the health care systems has in many ways prevented progress and I hope your example of a cross-disciplinary approach will in coming years influence the issues discussed in international forums. Thus yet again a Nordic example could provide others with guidance.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank those who have been responsible for organising the conference and express the hope that your deliberations will lead to improvements in treatment and care and thus in due course benefit those in need.

The health service will become an even more important part of our society and our economy in this new century and it will certainly reflect the excellence of the Nordic tradition if we can maintain our leading position in this important field. The Nordic welfare system based on equality of the service provided to all who suffer has been an important contribution to our definition of civilised society and it is of utmost importance that we continue to maintain our leadership in this field.

In such spirit I hereby declare the Scandinavian Neurological Congress and Scandinavian Congress of Neurological Nursing open, welcome our Nordic friends to Iceland and wish you all success and progress in your deliberations.