



**Address by
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at dinner in honour of
The Princess Royal
Bessastaðir
4 July 2002**

Your Royal Highness
Princess Royal
Góðir gestir
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that we welcome Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal here at Bessastaðir and we hope that these days in Iceland will provide Your Royal Highness with insights into the history and the culture of our people and also with ample evidence of how the forces of nature are still actively at work in our country.

The people of Iceland have highly appreciated the friendship shown towards us by the Royal Family. We remember fondly the visit made by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh and Prince Philip has furthermore been a frequent guest in our country, enjoying the unique bird life in north-eastern Iceland. The Prince of Wales came often in his earlier days to fish in the salmon rivers and it is worth reporting to His Royal Highness that the rivers are still as splendid as ever although the fishing has been somewhat less successful during the current season.

It is with warm references to these previous encounters that we welcome the Princess Royal to Iceland and we appreciate highly that Your Royal Highness has accepted to be a guest of honour at the National Tournament dedicated to the Icelandic horse.

Throughout our history, from the first days of the Icelandic settlement more than a thousand years ago, the Icelandic horse has been an integral part of our lives. Throughout the centuries it enabled the Icelandic people to become a nation, brought the farmers from all parts of

Iceland to Thingvellir every year for the meeting of the Parliament, the oldest national assembly in the world. Thus the horse was to some extent the foundation of our democracy and it became so intertwined with our culture that poets and writers have honoured it with many immortal texts.

The isolation of the country and deliberate policies in recent times have preserved the purity of the stock and we are therefore now able to demonstrate its unique attributes. We know that Your Royal Highness is a great connoisseur of horses and Your skill and knowledge in this field is known the world over. It is therefore both with pleasure and pride that thousands of Icelandic horsemen and women will greet Your Royal Highness at the National Tournament in Skagafjörður later in the week.

We have in modern times treated horsemanship as an integral part of our national sports and the most outstanding rider in our country has been chosen as the Sportsman of the Year. We therefore also welcome Your Royal Highness as a prominent member of the International Olympic Committee and salute Your outstanding work in the field of international sport cooperation.

Iceland and Great Britain have for centuries enjoyed a close and productive relationship. Britain is among our greatest trading partners and through the membership of European institutions and of NATO we have jointly worked for the consolidation of democracy, security and prosperity for all. Icelandic scholars, scientists and artists have received their education and training in the United Kingdom and hence our modern culture has been greatly enriched. The cooperation with Britain has been a strong influence in the successful evolution of the Icelandic republic.

It is in the spirit of this outstanding and long lasting friendship that we welcome Your Royal Highness to our country and we hope that the visit will be both informative and enjoyable.

I ask our guests to rise and to salute Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal and raise your glasses in honour of the friendship between our countries.