



**A Speech
by the
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at the opening of
the Multiple Integrated Use of Geothermal Resources
Conference
Reykjavík
15 September 2003**

Distinguished scientists,
professors, researchers.
Ladies and Gentlemen

How do we make a difference in the world? How do we contribute to improved well-being, economic progress and richer lives for others? How do we enhance scientific knowledge, encourage new discoveries and create a new vision of the future?

For a small nation these are important challenges, guidelines for our cooperation with countries near and far. The transformation of global relationships has made it paramount for communities to contribute to the advancement of mankind in certain significant ways. The formal premises of sovereignty and independence are no longer sufficient. In order to achieve recognition nations have to be pioneers in areas of relevance for others.

Iceland has been blessed with unique features which make it in a sense the centre of the on-going creation. The movement of the continental plates, the forces which tear them apart, the resulting volcanic eruptions, the displays made by the geysers and the trembling earth, the emergence of new islands out of the ocean, the moving lava, the fire below the glaciers – this magnificent spectacle has made Iceland a testing ground for man's responses to the challenge posed by these powerful natural forces.

Our scientists and technicians have certainly turned their endeavours in this field into a pioneering discipline which has enabled our country to

establish significant cooperation with nations all over the world: in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe – and consequently Iceland has enjoyed recognition and good-will. Within the United Nations, the Geothermal Training Programme in Iceland has been one of the successes of the university network initiated by the organisation. Now hundreds of specialists who received their training in Iceland are at work in different parts of the world.

Geothermal research and the harnessing of resources for the production of electricity, for heating towns and villages, for creating spas and recreational and sports facilities, for growing flowers and vegetables, have brought Iceland to the forefront in the utilisation of geothermal energy and thus consolidated our global position in significant ways.

We have consequently been able to create partnerships with China and Slovakia, Hungary and Russia, El Salvador and Nicaragua, Kenya, the Philippines and Turkey to name only a few of the 50 or so countries where Icelandic scientists and experts have made substantial contributions in recent decades.

Cooperation in the field of geothermal energy has at the opening of the 21st century become one of the main pillars of Iceland's international relations. This scientific knowledge provides our nation with a more solid position in the world – provides answers to the important questions I raised at the outset.

During my presidency I have witnessed the significance of our contribution in the field of geothermal energy on numerous occasions. Four recent State Visits are good examples: the visit of the President of China Jiang Zemin to Iceland last year and my own visits to Hungary and Slovenia this year and to Russia last year; in each and every one geothermal cooperation was among the chief tasks on the agenda.

A few weeks ago this was once again confirmed during my visits to Alaska and the Chukotka region in the far eastern part of Russia. In both places, interest in geothermal cooperation was predominant in our discussions.

I am deeply convinced that it is of the utmost importance for us to maintain leadership in this field and to strengthen our cooperation with scientists and experts all over the world.

It is in this spirit that I welcome the convening of this international conference to discuss the multiple integrated use of geothermal resources and congratulate the United Nations University Geothermal Training Programme in Iceland on its 25th anniversary.

The gathering of so many distinguished scientists and scholars, experts and technicians in our country manifests our determination to continue to explore this magnificent energy resource and thus enrich and improve the lives of our fellow human beings all over the world.

I hope your discussions and deliberations will further our knowledge and that your days in Iceland will bring you personal enjoyment, especially now when the autumn light makes the ever-changing symphony of colours even more mysterious.

I sometimes note with my foreign friends that the account given in the Old Testament of how the Almighty created the world in six days and then decided to rest because the work was finished is not entirely accurate. When it came to the creation of Iceland the Almighty seems to have become so fascinated by the possibilities that the creation has continued in our country until this very day and will do so long into the future with new volcanoes, new lava fields, new islands, new geysers and other spectacular evidence.

At your gathering here today, such a wealth of expertise about this ongoing creation has been assembled that I am sure the Almighty would feel quite at home in such distinguished company. Be that as it may, I am sure your conference will be a great success.

With these reflections in mind I welcome you to our country and it is both a pleasure and an honour for me to declare that the Multiple Integrated Use of Geothermal Resources conference is hereby open.