



Address
by the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at the opening of the Assembly
of the European Scout and Guide Movement
Reykjavík
April 17 2004

Distinguished leaders of the European Scout and Guide Movement

Addressing you here today is a particular honour for me, because as a young boy I became a member of a scout troop in a fishing town in Iceland's West Fjords and have ever since been deeply indebted to the movement and appreciative of the upbringing, training and character-building I gained from it.

When I moved to Reykjavík at the age of ten the Scouts provided me with a place of sanctuary and joy, and I still have vivid memories of the campfire on a beautiful summer evening in the vicinity of Þingvellir, Iceland's most sacred and historic shrine, when Lady Baden-Powell visited this country some fifty years ago.

The scouting movement occupies a special place of honour in the Icelanders' hearts. Every year, boy scouts and girl scouts are a strong presence at festive events, especially when we welcome the first day of summer after the long winter, and on our national day, June 17th; our sense of independence and identity are closely connected with the contribution made by the scout movement, and in coastal and rural towns and villages the Scouts are a strong element of the community.

It has been a particular pleasure for myself and my predecessors in the office of the President of Iceland to support the movement's activities. Every year a special ceremony is held at the Presidential church at Bessastaðir, when the President of Iceland's award is bestowed upon a number of young scouts and guides in recognition of their exceptional training and dedication to the movement. Over the years it has been an impressive team that the President has honoured in this way, a team which has certainly made a strong impact on Icelandic society.

The Icelanders are especially grateful to the scouts and guides movement and we value highly its contribution to the upbringing and character development of our young people, the way it has enriched and enhanced our society and created role models for young people.

Thus it is a great pleasure for us to hosts here in Iceland distinguished leaders of the European Scout and Guide Movement and welcome you all to productive discussions and forward-looking decisions.

In the evolution of the new Europe, the scouts and guides movement can have a constructive role to play, as a pillar for strengthening democracy and solidarity among countries that have recently won freedom and independence. An open and free society is based not only on law and a formal constitution; above all its roots lie in democratic culture, customs and traditions, in outlooks on life that embody mutual trust and respect for the contributions and opinions of others; it is woven at one and the same time from individualism and solid cooperation.

In this respect the scouting movement is a powerful force in the upbringing of young people and also instils respect for the environment and for nature, for the life that Earth fosters.

At the beginning of the new century, when sweeping changes are creating a new Europe and revolutionising the entire world, the scouting movement is the standard-bearer of values and outlooks that are the essence of a realistic and bold-minded vision, values that give pride of place to the rights of man and of nature.

It is in the spirit of these ideals that we warmly welcome you all to Iceland, and with deep gratitude and hopes for your success I wish your assembly productive endeavours.