



**Inaugural Address**  
**by**  
**the President of Iceland**  
**Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson**  
**at Delhi Sustainable Development Summit**  
**India**  
**3 February 2005**

Distinguished ministers

Leaders in science, business, media and international cooperation

Dear Indian friends

Ladies and gentlemen

For me a journey to India is always a pilgrimage, to honour the achievements of this great nation, to salute how you have celebrated democracy in a world torn by oppression and authoritarian regimes, how you have preserved the harmony of different religions, different races, different traditions, how you have developed your economic and social potential despite widespread poverty, the legacy of colonial rule.

Yes, it has been a monumental struggle – of course with several setbacks, disappointments and frustrations – but at the outset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century India is stronger and more dynamic than ever, its democracy thriving, its economy growing, becoming one of the chief motors of future global growth, and India whose international leadership is urgently needed and welcomed.

For those of us who have had the fortune to be friends of India the news is indeed good and getting better. I remember vividly my first meeting with Indira Gandhi more than twenty years ago, the cooperation, profound dialogue and friendship I enjoyed with Rajiv, the desperation prevailing at his funeral, remember the conversations I had in this country throughout the following years: the hopes and the determination expressed by those fortunate to be chosen by the Indian people to lead the country forward.

India has emerged as a powerful guardian and a beacon for the times ahead, inspired by her democratic experience and economic achievements but also as the bearer of a strong international consciousness, rooted in the heritage of Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi; sharing with China the honour and the responsibility of being the largest nation on

earth, sharing with America and Europe, the heritage of democratic ideas, sharing with Africa, others in Asia and the Latin hemisphere the hopes and aspirations of the developing countries.

India is perhaps better placed than all other countries to be the cornerstone of a global forum dedicated to exploring how we can survive as humankind, how we can prevent disastrous climatic change, how we can achieve sustainable development and provide future generations with the opportunity to thrive and prosper.

We have assembled here in Delhi to discuss and deliberate upon those challenging tasks and to share our experience gained in public service or scientific explorations, in the media or business and many other endeavours. We are brought together by the acknowledgement that we share a common responsibility, that our fate is the fate of every nation, that our future is indeed a joint enterprise – a joint venture, to use a fashionable term from the global market.

We are also humbled by the recent tragedies caused by the Tsunami, the deaths and the devastation brought about by the giant wave, tragedies that remind us that the forces of nature are indeed stronger than all our achievements, that nations far apart can in an instant suddenly share a joint fate. Even in the Nordic countries, in the corner of Northern Europe, people's souls were deeply touched when the flag-draped coffins came home. All over the world poor and rich, young and old have joined hands in providing help and assistance.

If the Tsunami with all its tragic consequences is to have a lasting inspiration for us all, it is perhaps by illustrating how the evolution of the earth can affect each and every nation, how the planet's geology and climate determine the fate of all nations, how we must take a global view of our future.

Such a perspective can fortunately be gained from other sources. We are able to witness other wake-up calls than the tragic deaths caused by the Tsunami.

The bells of the Arctic are also ringing. In the Northern regions, vast and disturbing evidence of the immediate danger of climatic change is appearing at an alarming rate.

There are, however, many people in prominent positions who doubt the mounting evidence of climate change, people who take a relaxed view of our future, who believe that there is no reason to be alarmed, who even classify the growing scientific data as sophisticated scare-mongering masquerading as wisdom and learning.

To them, I offer an invitation. Join me on a journey to the North, to the Arctic regions. Let us travel together throughout the Russian tundra, across Siberia to Alaska and the northern Canadian territories, onto Greenland and Iceland and the Arctic provinces of the Scandinavian countries.

The evidence from the Arctic is indeed convincing and the consequences of the developments up in the north will affect the entire world, primarily through rising sea levels all over the globe and through dramatic changes in the conveyor belt of ocean currents which ranges from the North Atlantic to the Indian Ocean and onwards into the Pacific.

Towards the end of last year the Arctic Council produced a monumental report on the impacts of warming in the region, prepared by a great gathering of scientists and representatives of research institutions from the eight member countries, including many from America, Canada and Russia. The report is the most comprehensive analysis of what is happening in the Arctic regions, mounting evidence backed up by accounts from the people who live in the far North, those who see the effects of climatic change on their daily life.

The report was presented to the ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council in Reykjavik, the capital of my country, last November and is in my opinion one of the most important contributions to the global debate on climatic change. Primarily because the evidence existing in the Northern regions is so dramatic and so clear to the open eye. One only has to enter those regions to be able to bear witness to what is taking place. But the report is also of great political importance because the Arctic Council, founded a decade ago, has become one of the pillars of the new relationship between Russia and the United States, a forum where representatives from Washington come to speak on behalf of the American Administration.

If the doubters and distracters in the debate on global warming, those who criticise all warnings of climatic change, were to accept my invitation to travel to the north they would be able to witness dramatic changes:

- The melting of glaciers throughout the Arctic, both in my own country and in Alaska, the state which again strongly voted George W. Bush into office.
- The melting of the Greenland ice sheet which in recent years has broken all previous records.
- The diminishing of lake and river ice which has reduced the ice season by up to a month, leading to severe economic consequences for both the oil and the gas industries and for the mining of diamonds and various metals.
- The growing flow of fresh water from the arctic rivers into the Atlantic Ocean, thus affecting the balance of salt level which drives the global conveyor belt of ocean currents throughout the world. The consequences for the global and regional climate and for living conditions in Africa, Asia and other parts of the world would indeed be dramatic.

Rising sea levels would disastrously affect the fate of people in distant regions, with consequences akin to the destruction of communities in the wake of the recent Tsunami. The giant wave can thus be seen as a forewarning of our future fate if mankind fails to unite in common action dedicated to the prevention of further climate change, fails to join in the creation of a global programme dedicated to the elimination of the climatic threat.

In my own country we are, in our own small way, attempting to pave the way towards a more secure future, primarily through the development of environmentally clean energy resources, the utilisation of geothermal power and the creation of a hydrogen-driven traffic system, inspired by the future vision of cities where emissions from cars are only white steam and everyone can breath fresh air in the middle of a busy street.

Although Iceland is now in the forefront of the utilisation of geothermal power it was not always so; in the 1940s Reykjavík was covered by black smoke from coal fires, but now over 90% of the houses in my country are heated with geothermal and other clean energy resources.

Similarly other nations have turned out to be richer in geothermal resources than they had been led to believe. A major international programme to enhance geothermal power across the world could thus be a fundamental contribution to the campaign against climatic change. California, for example, following its energy crisis, suddenly woke up to its rich geothermal potential. China now wants geothermal heating for the Olympic Village. Even large parts of Africa have ample geothermal resources which are more conducive to the continent's energy needs and overall development than the large and environmentally unsound power projects that are usually presented to the planning boards.

The first hydrogen filling station in the world was inaugurated in Reykjavík in April 2003, designed to be open to public services. Already the people of Reykjavík can take hydrogen-driven buses from one part of the city to another.

Hydrogen is currently one of the buzz-words in the debate on future policies on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, in Europe and America. But in Iceland the hydrogen option is not only a future vision but also an experience already at hand. We hope to enhance hydrogen cooperation with other countries and to develop together a transport system for the cities of the future, a transport system based on clean energy and the determination to drive pollution from our cities large and small, cities all over the world.

We see it as our mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to further a global dialogue on these issues and to strengthen the international experience in this field, to pave the way towards a safer future and to show others what can be done.

In this way Iceland sees itself as a laboratory of the future, as a forum where alternative approaches can be tested and explored.

It is with this mission in mind, visiting India that I am eager to demonstrate our willingness to reach out to you all, to join hands with each and everyone who wants to work for a better world.

We are indeed all responsible for our fate, whether we come from governments, international organisations, the world of business, science, media or from other walks of life. The challenge ahead must be the essence of our democratic dialogue, the core of our moral and public duty.

India has brought us together and by the broad membership of our assembly indicated that what is needed is a global coalition, an open network of all who care and are willing to take action.

With India at the core – India, the largest democracy on earth, the leading economy of the future, the home of more races and religions than any other country on the planet – we can create together such a global coalition, a coalition which is urgently needed and should be opened to all.

Urged on by India, the new coalition would indeed be a hopeful endeavour, a promise of concrete solutions in the years to come.