



**A Speech**  
**by the President of Iceland**  
**Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson**  
**at**  
**the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit**  
**New Delhi**  
**22 January 2007**

Your Excellencies  
Distinguished scientists  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with profound pleasure that I return to India to engage in discussions with the visionaries who have assembled here today, to formulate new ideas and programmes, to decide how we can move the world forward and create sustainable foundations for prosperity and welfare.

The friendship I have enjoyed with India ever since I first came here in 1983 to meet Indira Gandhi has been one of the great privileges of my life and has influenced my intellectual, emotional and political being in so many different ways.

The growing cooperation between India and Iceland is now one of the main pillars of my Presidency. It shows how, in the new century, nations far apart, nations different in size and culture can move forward together in productive ways. The democratic heritage has indeed been helpful: India the largest democracy; Iceland the oldest democracy in the world.

I am also proud that my friend the President of Finland has, following our frequent discussions on India, accepted the invitation to be with us here today. It is indeed an historical event; never before have two Heads of State from the Nordic countries shared a visit to India, thus demonstrating a shared vision of the future.

Yes – the future! Sometimes it seems to be hidden away at such a distance and we forget to take the proper precautions. But time flies

swiftly; all of a sudden we are confronted by problems that we thought would be the concern of generations to come, not of our own.

Last year will undoubtedly be remembered for the fundamental shift in the discussion on climate change. Suddenly, national leaders all over the world, the cream of the world's scientists and directors of many of the world's largest companies found themselves standing shoulder-to-shoulder on a common ground.

All of them had the same message to deliver: In only a few decades, the climate and conditions for life on Earth might deteriorate so seriously as to threaten the health and the prosperity of billions of people.

It is no longer generally disputed that pollution of the atmosphere is posing a new threat to mankind – though of course some people find ways of persuading themselves that there is nothing the matter, just as there are a few who still uphold the doctrines of the Flat Earth Society.

Fortunately, there are not many who are still willing to bury their heads in the sand and hope for the best.

The focus is now almost entirely on the question of how quickly we must respond. The latest studies indicate that we have only a few decades in which to act.

The burning questions are asked every day: “What can we do? What weapons can science and technology give us?”

Here, India and Iceland have a lot to offer, and the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit and TERI have become important instruments under the visionary and effective leadership of Dr Pachauri.

I also strongly believe that my country could play an important role in the search for new solutions, as is demonstrated by the high proportion of renewable energy in Iceland's total consumption.

Within the lifetime of one generation we have moved from being largely dependent on coal to fulfilling 70% of our total energy needs from renewable resources, and 100% of our electricity production is based on clean energy.

Other nations are now increasingly seeking to learn from our experience.

Recently, in the Chinese city of Xian Yang, the first stage of a new geothermal district heating system was opened. This will be the largest of its type in the world, built by the Chinese in partnership with Icelandic companies. It will not only transform the energy economy of Xian Yang

but also improve the health of its citizens in revolutionary ways. Pollution from coal fires will no longer cause diseases, so there will be tremendous savings in the cost of health care in the decades to come.

Iceland has managed to build up a leading position in the harnessing of geothermal energy; our energy companies are now involved in various projects in Europe, Asia, the United States and other parts of the world. Hundreds of experts from all continents have graduated from the United Nations Geothermal Training Programme, which was established in Iceland three decades ago, and most of them are now playing leading roles in the exploitation of geothermal resources in their home countries.

During my stay in India I will have discussions with political leaders, entrepreneurs and experts on how best to utilize the potential of geothermal energy in India, drawing attention to the conclusion recently reached by global investors that geothermal energy is by far the most profitable form of clean energy, and one that could bring India tremendous economic advantages.

My discussions here in Delhi will be based partly on the results of two international conferences which I hosted last year in Iceland.

One, the Global Roundtable on Climate Change, was attended by representatives of many of the world's largest companies, leading scientists in various disciplines and influential figures from Europe, the USA, India and China. It was devoted to identifying how the energy requirements of this young century could be met by using new technology and at the same time combatting climate change.

In connection with this conference, an agreement was signed to launch an experiment involving Icelandic scientists, Reykjavík Energy and leading universities in Europe and the USA devoted to the long-term sequestration of carbon dioxide deep in the ground. A method developed in Iceland could, if it proves successful, be applied in other countries endowed with basalt bedrocks, such as India, Russia and North America.

The second conference, the Iceland Climate Change Action Summit, attracted a strong team of Young Global Leaders from all parts of the world – outstanding achievers summoned by the famous Davos World Economic Forum to play a leading role in the years ahead. These young people agreed to make Iceland the venue for their discussion of the world's energy resources, and brought with them international investors who are willing to give powerful support to the struggle to combat climate change.

What was said by the participants in these conferences, and also conversations which I have had with leading figures in many countries – businessmen, global thinkers, pioneers in science, including many of my friends in India – has convinced me to work towards making Iceland into a centre of international collaboration on the development of different forms of clean energy, a centre in the quest to achieve concrete results and thus divert the hazards posed to everyone on our planet.

The world needs such a centre with a strong emphasis on the utilisation and technological development of different forms of clean energy, in order to focus discussions and decisions, to create more contacts and establish confidence. Participants could come from all over the world and the process would be open to all and any who could make a contribution.

I consequently decided to announce this vision in my New Year's Address. My mission in India now is to build support for this proposal, to move towards making this vision a reality: that Iceland offers itself to the world as a centre of international collaboration and discussions on clean energy, a centre of knowledge and activities aimed at saving our children and future generations from the threat of irreversible climate change, and at the same time laying the foundations for a sustainable future.

I believe that the smallness of my nation is in this respect a great advantage. It is often easier for others to participate in efforts that have been organised by a small country.

We have no ulterior motives; we enjoy friendly relations with all nations and pose a threat to no one.

The cooperation which has in recent years been established between India and Iceland in science, technology and clean energy development could be of great value in this process. The State Visit by President Kalam to Iceland in 2005 and my own frequent journeys to India have in significant ways strengthened the framework for the success of our efforts.

Together we can send a strong signal to the rest of the world; we can show others what can indeed be done.

I have come here today to invite you all to participate in this project, to help in furthering this effort and to seek your advice and your guidance.