



Science can help our Fight

A message from the President of Iceland Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson

One of the most pressing challenges of our times is to protect young people from the constant flow of narcotic drugs into our societies. The salesmen of death do not miss any chance to take advantage of the vulnerability of our adolescents. The methods and the networks reach across any border, all oceans.

The only way to fight this scourge is for society as a whole to stand united and use the best possible means available. None of us can do this on our own. We have to work together and learn from each others experience.

In Iceland we have developed a model which has proved to be succesful. It is based on scientic research over two decades which has shown that the most productive way to fight drugs is by strengthening the willpower of the teenagers to say no.

Our best social scientists at the University of Iceland and Reykjavik University have introduced these methods, tried and tested in our capital city, Reykjavík, to a greater audience in Europe and the USA and this effort has been very successful. The project, *Youth in Europe*, is built on this experience. I am honoured and proud to be its patron.

It has been impressive how the research has shown that three simple factors contribute significantly to reducing the likelyhood of adolescent drug abuse. First, that teenagers who spend more time with their families are less likely than others to start using drugs; even one hour a day is enough to

make a great difference. Second, that those who take part in sports and other organized youth activity are in a better position to resist the temptation of using drugs. Third, there is a clear relationship between the age when teenagers start drinking alcohol and the likelihood of them later using drugs. Every year counts.

This does not sound like rocket science but the evidence is clear. By basing prevention activities on this proven research, we can significantly reduce the impact of narcotic drugs.

On the basis of this scientific knowledge, we organized last September a nation-wide *Drug Prevention Day* involving every primary school in the country, the national youth and sport associations, municipalities and the media. It proved to be an outstanding success and we would be happy to share this experience and the Icelandic model with other cities and communities in Europe.

I hope that others can learn from the experience my country offers and thus we can jointly fight for the benefit of our young generations.

I welcome all the cities which decide to participate with us in the *Youth in Europe* programme. I encourage you to talk to the experts on how to move forward. Together we will be able to celebrate success.