



**A Speech
by
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at a State Dinner
in honour of
the President of Uganda
HE Yoweri Museveni
and
Madam Janet Museveni
Bessastaðir
17 September 2008**

Your Excellency President Yoweri Museveni,
Madam Janet Museveni,
Distinguished ministers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a profound honour for Dorrit and me to welcome the President of Uganda and Madam Museveni to Iceland and thus celebrate our growing cooperation with Africa.

Here at Bessastaðir, this historic residence, we are reminded that although Iceland and Africa are far apart, and our landscape and environment, temperature and climate are very different, there are greater similarities in our history, our fight for independence and economic development than most people might expect.

The old house where You entered, built more than two hundred years ago, was the cradle of the campaign for Iceland's independence. It was the only school in a country which for centuries had been the poorest in Europe, a colony without any political or economic rights, a nation of farmers and fishermen. Discussions among the students in the room behind this wall led to claims for a better deal from the colonial masters and gradually, step by step, through a struggle which lasted one hundred years, the Republic was finally established in 1944.

But the fight was not over. Without control of the ocean resources, the economic foundation supporting our sovereignty would have collapsed. Consequently, we expanded our fishing limits, first to 12 miles in the 1950s, then to 50 miles and later 200 miles in the 1970s. Every time, the British Government sent the Royal Navy in order to stop us; aiming to preserve the right to exploitation by their own fleet of trawlers.

The people of Iceland will never forget that in those crucial times the young Organisation of African Unity sent a delegation to this island in the North Atlantic to express solidarity and support for our struggle.

Our friends in Africa knew from their own experience what was at stake and became the only international organisation to come forward openly as our allies.

In welcoming Your Excellency and Your delegation here tonight, I pay tribute to the vision of the African leaders who, decades ago, understood that solidarity across oceans and continents must be the essential core of a more progressive global community; that together we share a common future; can reach through cooperation to new and fertile horizons.

Owing to our independence and the control over the riches of the ocean, and also to the utilisation of clean energy resources, my country has been able to transform its society so that we now rank among the most prosperous and successful countries in the world, providing education and health care for all our citizens, irrespective of class, income or location.

It has now become our mission to share these lessons and our experience with others in different parts of the world. During Your visit I hope we can thus consolidate the foundation of further cooperation between Uganda and Iceland.

Your country, like mine, is blessed with geothermal resources and earlier today we witnessed together the enormous power which resides inside the Earth and how it can be harnessed, not only to produce electricity and drive industrial projects but also to grow vegetables, heat spas, make cosmetics and create sophisticated tourist locations.

In honour of Your Excellency's and Madam Museveni's vegetarian customs, we decided to offer You and the other distinguished guests here tonight a vegetarian dinner, based partly on the products from the warm Icelandic geothermal greenhouses – a proof that this important source of clean energy can also help us to achieve a healthier life style.

Tomorrow we will introduce You to our fishing industry and how sustainable use of the ocean resources has led to prosperity for our people. The fishing town of Grindavík, which You will visit, is a sample of what can be found all over Iceland: good housing, health care, schools, sports facilities, cultural centres and other public achievements created by the wealth which we have derived from the ocean.

Furthermore, in recent years the information revolution, with computers, mobile phones and internet access, has spread to every part of our country, connecting remote villages and isolated communities to a global network; thus giving the education of the young a new dimension.

In this area too we can attempt to help each other so in the years to come every son and daughter of our lands can aim high, preserving their roots while becoming globally active.

We see in Your visit the opening of a new era in our engagement with Africa and are both grateful and honoured that the President of Uganda has come to our shores as winter is approaching.

We salute the people of Your country and hope that the growing cooperation between Uganda and Iceland can be a model for others, a demonstration of how we can work together for a more successful common future.

In this spirit I ask the distinguished guests to rise and lift your glasses in honour of President Museveni and Madam Museveni and for the everlasting friendship between the people of Uganda and Iceland.