



ICELAND – THE COUNTRY OF CREATION

Greetings from the President of Iceland Olafur Ragnar Grimsson

In my conversation with President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro in the Quirinale last November we agreed that an ideal way for people to find out how sophisticated culture could thrive in small societies – such as in ancient Rome – would be to visit Iceland. Such is the fermentation of arts and culture, music, literature, drama and visual arts to be found on our unique island surrounded by the North Atlantic Ocean.

Nature itself, the mountains, rivers, lakes, magnificent colours of the lava and heaths, and walks in valleys and fjords, provide magnificent opportunities to witness the creation of the Earth at first hand.

The Bible describes how God created the Earth in six days and then decided to rest. The only problem with this holy text is that the Almighty apparently decided no to rest when it came to Iceland. Here the creation of the Earth has continued to this very day.

The creative forces of nature have also profoundly influenced the culture and the artistic life of my country. Today, Reykjavik is the nation's artistic and cultural centre, a true powerhouse of innovation and diversity. There is a choice of 20-30 theatre performances in the city every week, along with numerous concerts. At weekends from autumn to spring, so many new art exhibitions are opened that even the most devoted lovers of culture cannot manage to visit them all. The selection available at Reykjavik's impressive bookshops is reminiscent of that in major metropolises, reflecting the fact that more novels and poetry, academic works, biographies and translations of world literature are published in Iceland than in countries with populations many times the size.

A further dimension is added by being able to discuss your Icelandic experience and recall found memories over a fine meal at the country's quality restaurants. Iceland's unique seafood and highland lamb are so exquisite that many people promise themselves to visit the country again – just for a meal!

I hope the people of Italy will continue to visit us in Iceland. We treasure the friendships that have been created by such journeys.