



**Address
by the
President of Iceland
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson
at a special session of Alþingi
at Þingvellir
18 July 2018**

Members of Alþingi,
my fellow Icelanders!

On this special occasion, it is fitting that we meet here at Þingvellir, whose history is bound up with the history of Icelandic society. Here, nearly eleven hundred years ago, a general assembly was founded in Iceland. And over the years and centuries, decisions made by the chieftains at Þingvellir informed the lives of the people of Iceland. Our cultural heritage too has its roots here: the Icelandic sagas take place against the background of Þingvellir, and this was the scene of historic events that live on in national memory. We can look to Þingvellir for words of wisdom and good sense to counteract superstition, fear and prejudice: when a volcanic eruption took place after the Icelanders abandoned the Old Norse religion in favour of Christianity, some die-hard heathens claimed that the Norse gods were angry. But the chieftain Snorri retorted: “What had angered the gods when the lava flowed on which we are now standing?”

Here we can also find wise words about our society and the rule of law. “It is so,” said Þorgeir, Chieftain of Ljósavatn, “that if we sunder the law, we shall also sunder the peace,” explaining his recommendation that all Icelanders should adopt the Christian religion. About a decade later, bloody conflict broke out here on the plains, in violation of the ban on fighting on the assembly site. The dispute was only resolved when the chieftain Hallur of Síða stepped in to propose a compromise – pointing out that he did not mind being called unmanly for his action. Society is grounded in compromise, a constant quest for harmony,

and not an oligarchy of the powerful. May that lesson ring out from here at Þingvellir!

We Icelanders can always look to our treasury of saga literature. It is of course impossible to verify that the old chieftains and heroes spoke the exact words quoted in the sagas – which had been recounted over centuries before they were put into writing. But it cannot be disproved, either; and it is the import of their words that matters – the wisdom and knowledge that we wish to honour and follow.

We must take care, however, not to focus solely on glorious memories of Þingvellir. This was the site of the Law Rock and the Law Council, but also of the execution block, and a deep pool known as the Drowning Pool. “Evil is their injustice,” wrote Nobel-prizewinning novelist Halldór Laxness, “but their justice is worse.” People were harshly punished here for minor infractions, or none at all; women were executed here, for crimes committed against them. The history of this place is thus also the history of the oppressed, the subjugated. Blessings on the memory of all those who were subjected here to cruelty and violence, injustice and brutality.

My fellow-Icelanders: While acknowledging the adversities in our past, let us rejoice over the obvious progress that has been achieved in the life of this nation. Early in July 1918, representatives of the Danish realm stood here in this place, at the invitation of Icelanders, who negotiated with them on equal terms to draw up the Union Treaty on the relationship between their two countries. On 18 July, a century ago, the agreement on the Treaty was signed, and 1 December 1918 marked a new beginning for Iceland, when it became a free and sovereign nation.

The final step in Iceland’s journey to self-determination was also taken here at Þingvellir, on 17 June 1944. The Republic of Iceland was founded. Yet it never really ends – the quest for sovereignty and independence, for a society of justice and fairness, in cooperation with other nations, in keeping with our wishes and needs. And we will always have Þingvellir – it will continue to strike us with awe, as it must have struck Grímur *geitskör* and his men when they went in search of a suitable site for the general assembly. They looked out over the woodlands, the plains and the lake, and concluded that they need search no farther. Much has changed in a thousand years and more, yet the beauty of Þingvellir lives on. And may it also live on, the natural love of country felt by us, who live in Iceland; our respect for each other and for the country which has been entrusted to our care. That idea has inspired innumerable poems. Ingibjörg Haraldsdóttir’s poem *Land* expresses that reverence without hubris or arrogance:

I tell you nothing of the land
I sing no patriotic songs
of the caves, the waterfalls, the hot springs
the ewes and the cows
of the people's struggles
and adversities in perilous weather

no. But stand by me
in the dark. Breathe deeply
and feel it flow

and say:
This is my home.

Yes, this is our home. We are Icelanders, a free nation in a beautiful country. And the future is in our hands: open, uncertain, full of challenges and responses.

Members of Alþingi: I rejoice with you over the foundation of the Children's Culture Fund and the building of a new maritime research ship. Progress consists in improvements to children's lives, education and culture, research, and sustainable use of natural resources in accord with our needs. My fellow-Icelanders, may we enjoy the good fortune to continue to walk the right path, into the years ahead.

Adjournment of Parliament President of Iceland

I shall now read a presidential announcement which has been issued on the adjournment of Alþingi.

“The President of Iceland makes known:

That I, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister and with reference to approval by Alþingi, adjourn the 148th legislative session of Alþingi from 18 July until 11 September 2018.

Done in Reykjavík, 17 July 2018.
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson.

/Katrín Jakobsdóttir.

Presidential announcement regarding adjournment of sessions of Alþingi.”

In accord with this announcement, which I have now read aloud, I declare that the 148th legislative session of Alþingi is adjourned.

I ask the members of Alþingi to stand and pay tribute to our mother country.