



**Address by
the President of Iceland
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson
at a dinner hosted by
the Government of Greenland
at the Hans Egede House in Nuuk,
25 September 2019**

Premier Minister Kim Kielsen,
Ministers of the Government of Greenland,
ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of my wife Eliza and myself, I thank you for the friendly reception we have been given on our visit to Greenland, and all the hospitality you have shown us, dear neighbours in the north.

Yes, we are guests of our good neighbours here in this huge country, a land of challenges and opportunities. We observe our Greenlandic friends on their path of progress, and are eager to collaborate with you in all fields. We wish you good fortune.

I must admit that we Icelanders are not as well-informed as we should be about the history of Greenland, which we tend to view from our own perspective. In school we learn about the people who sailed westwards from Iceland more than a thousand years ago, discovered land there, and called it Greenland. We are curious about the fate of the Norse settlement here, and why it died out after a few centuries. And in the 19th century, when the Icelanders embarked on their own route to self-determination, people in Iceland claimed that the status of the Icelanders and of the nation which inhabits this country could not be deemed equivalent – that we had a good claim on all counts, while you did not. Early in the 20th century, some Icelanders also argued selfishly that Greenland should come under Icelandic rule.

Fortunately, such attitudes belong to the past. Now we observe the Greenlandic nation as it progresses. Still, we could undoubtedly pay more attention to developments here in Greenland. Some years ago, I heard it said that Icelanders knew more about what was happening on the moon than in this country, our near neighbour. But perhaps that is an exaggeration – we Icelanders sometimes tend to exaggerate, say a little too much.

We should also learn more about your Greenlandic history, forgetting for the moment Erik the Red and his companions, and looking instead to others who made their homes here. It is a phenomenal story. Century after century, people grappled with the extraordinary task of surviving in one of the world's harshest environments. Yes, your forefathers and foremothers succeeded in wresting a living from the few resources available to them in the land of ice and sea. In addition, your culture and language have experienced the turmoil of our own times – and survived foreign influences which have not always been beneficial.

These achievements can justly fill you with pride, dear hosts, and imbue you with strength to address the challenges that face Greenlandic society today. These must not be glossed over, as you yourselves are surely well aware.

What will happen next? The future awaits, with all its uncertainty and innumerable tasks. Earlier this year you marked the tenth anniversary of the Self-government Act in this country. That was a time for celebration, extending still further your rights of self-determination. May you have good fortune on the path you have chosen, as we Icelanders had good fortune at the time when we were progressing step by step towards our final objective, more or less in concord with the other party involved.

Dear hosts, dear Greenlanders: we Icelanders look forward to strengthening still further the bonds which connect our two countries. We can work together in the fields of fisheries and tourism. We can work together on health, education and cultural matters, and we can make Iceland a convenient connecting point between Greenland and the outside world.

Yes, we can learn from each other and be supportive of each other, not least in difficult times. Together we must confront the climate emergency that is surely clear to all of us – not least here in the arctic region. And we Icelanders will never forget the generous help provided by Greenlanders after disastrous avalanches in the West Fjords about a quarter of a century ago. Many people in Iceland also recall the time when a Greenlandic visitor was asked what we could learn from Greenlanders – which was an unusual question, as, sad to say, we have a tendency to be telling you what you may be able to learn from us. But the Greenlander gave the matter some thought, then remarked that Icelanders did many things well, but that perhaps they might learn from Greenlanders to smile more, and laugh more.

Dear hosts, dear Greenlanders. Thank you once more for your hospitality. I wish you all good fortune in this great country, which can provide you and the coming generations with a prosperous future. With warm greetings from Iceland I thank you for receiving us, and ask you to stand, lift your glasses and drink a toast to the brotherly and sisterly bond between Icelanders and Greenlanders, these thriving friends and neighbours in the far north.