



Kveðja til Vestur-Íslendinga

Kæru Vestur-Íslendingar,
Dear Western Icelanders,

During these dangerous and difficult days, my wife Eliza and I send you our best wishes. We all face a common foe. The pandemic that has so disrupted our daily lives – and sadly taken so many lives around the world – does not recognize borders or passports; it does not respect the command of authority. While states must base their response on their own needs and estimates, the more unity we can show, the better.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Iceland was repeatedly struck by epidemics and serious illnesses. Many of those who decided to seek a new life in North America came from families and communities that were marked by such misfortune. The journey westwards was not without health hazards and the settlers encountered various challenges in the new world.

But they persevered. Your ancestors persevered. The time even came when they were able to support their old motherland, most noticeably by assisting in the formation of the Icelandic Steamship Company in 1914, a vital step on our road to self-reliance. Four years later, Iceland gained full sovereignty, an event of great celebration in my country's history. People's joy was marred, however, by the influenza epidemic that raged at the time, in Iceland, North America and elsewhere.

Our losses were great. Today, we are better equipped to deal with an invisible enemy of this kind. The strength of science and our collective efforts will be decisive, just as they have overcome other outbreaks. Also, we owe our wonderful healthcare staff a debt of gratitude.

Dear friends, kæru vinir! Eliza and I remember fondly our visit to Manitoba last year, when we celebrated the centenary of the Icelandic National League of North America. I also recall pleasant occasions when, as a lecturer in history at the University of Iceland, I taught young people in the Snorri program about Iceland's past, present and future opportunities.

Sadly, journeys between countries have all but stopped for the time being, and curfews or severe restrictions on people's movements within states have been put in place. But this disorder will not last. Ultimately, we will conquer the virus and its effect on our societies. Let us look forward to a future where free citizens can again converge and cooperate, travel and enjoy each other's company, to the benefit of all humankind.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Guðni Th. Jóhannesson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Guðni Th. Jóhannesson,
President of Iceland