



**Address
by President of Iceland
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson
for Icelanders' Day,
Íslendingadagurinn, 1-3 August 2020**

Kæru Vestur-Íslendingar!

Dear Canadians and Americans of Icelandic origin

On behalf of the people of Iceland, I send you all my warmest greetings on Íslendingadagurinn. This event, now celebrated for the 131st time, symbolises the strong bond between us, the bond that stretches from our small island in the North Atlantic to your great continent.

The story of your ancestors is a story of determination and drive, the story of your amma and afi, langafi and langamma, and langalangamma and langalangafi. These Icelanders wanted to seek a new and better future. They encountered hardship, disappointment, and sometimes even failure. But they persevered.

And here we are today, in a spirit of celebration and joy. The event is of course marred and marked by the pandemic that has so disrupted our daily lives. Our thoughts must be with those who have lost a loved one because of the virus. Let us hope that we will soon conquer this foe so that we may again gather on pleasant occasions like Íslendingadagurinn, travel freely and visit each other as before.

Kæru Vestur-Íslendingar – dear Western-Icelanders as we say over here: We seek strength in knowing our past, acknowledging where we came from. We should value the positive aspects of patriotism, a love for one's country and society, its culture and heritage. In one of his best-known poems, Stephan Stephansson, an Icelander who emigrated at a young age to North America almost 150 years ago, described how we can make ourselves a new home and a new life in a new world, but still carry with us memories of the land where we come from. Here's the opening verse, first in Icelandic, then English:

Þó[tt] þú langförull legðir
sérhvert land undir fót.
Bera hugur og hjarta
samt þíns heimalands mót.

To the uttermost outlands
Of the earth you may roam,
In the mind every moment
Are the memories of home.

Yes, old and new can be entwined, the distant and the close. We need to understand the power of positive patriotism. It is our task to foster in our national identity a feeling of open-mindedness and inclusion. In today's Iceland, where more than one tenth of the population has overseas origins, this is a vital necessity, a self-evident approach. Besides, history provides ample examples about the benefits to societies of such tolerance and altruism – as well as the danger of chauvinism, prejudice and intolerance of any kind.

So, dear friends, let us celebrate Íslendingadagurinn and the positive aspects of nationalism and independence, the freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of love, the freedom to breathe, the freedom to seek inspiration from history but also the duty to accept and learn from the more negative aspects of our past.

Congratulations on Íslendingadagurinn! Til hamingju með daginn!