

**Address by Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of
Iceland, on the occasion of the signing of the charter as well
as the first allocation of grants from the Professor Sigurður
Helgason Award Fund**

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Former President of Iceland, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, Prof.
Sigurður Helgason, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to welcome you all to this event, held to formally
establish the **Professor Sigurður Helgason Award Fund** and
sign its charter. Today, we will also present the first awards
granted through the fund.

The University of Iceland greatly appreciates the generosity
of Sigurður Helgason. Let me start by telling you a little bit
about his distinguished career.

Sigurður Helgason was born on September 30th, 1927 in
Akureyri. In 1945, at the age of 17, he received his Icelandic
matriculation examination from Menntaskólinn á Akureyri,
the Upper Secondary School in Akureyri. After one academic
year with the Faculty of Engineering at the University of
Iceland, Sigurður moved to Denmark to study mathematics.
In 1952, he finished with a Mag.Scient. degree from the
University of Copenhagen. The same institution had awarded

him a Gold Medal the year before. After graduation, Sigurður moved across the Atlantic to continue his studies at Princeton University, where he received a doctorate in mathematics in 1954. He then worked at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Princeton University, the University of Chicago, and Columbia University between 1954 and 1960, before returning to MIT, where he became full professor in 1965.

During his career, Sigurður has been a prolific scholar producing more than ten books and numerous articles in the field of mathematics.

He has received various awards for his work as well as honorary doctorates from the University of Iceland, the University of Copenhagen, and the University of Uppsala in 1986, 1988, and 1996, respectively. He became member of the Icelandic Academy of Sciences in 1960, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1970, and the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters in 1972. In 1975, Sigurður received the First Graduate Student Award for Teaching at MIT. Moreover, he was awarded the Børge Jessen Diplom by the Danish Mathematical Society in 1982, the Steele Prize of the American Mathematical Society in 1988, and the Major Knight's Cross of the Icelandic Order of the Falcon in 1991.

Last but not least, Sigurður was named Honorary Member of the Icelandic Mathematical Society in 1997.

Dear guests, even though I can only summarise the most important achievements here today, it is clear that Sigurður Helgason has had a highly successful and impressive career as both a teacher and scholar. I don't think anyone will disagree, when I say that Sigurður is the most successful Icelandic mathematician on an international level.

Even though Sigurður has lived in the United States for the past 65 years, he has always maintained close connections to his home country and has paid Iceland a visit each year.

Sigurður has shown his strong bonds to his home country through his great generosity. He has made donations, both monetary and in the form of books, to the National and University Library as well as the Faculty of Physical Sciences of the University of Iceland, and donated the prize money for the Reykjavík Open chess tournament, just to name a few.

It is a great honour for the University of Iceland that Sigurður has now decided to establish the Professor Sigurður Helgason Award Fund with a generous capital contribution. On behalf of the University of Iceland, I would like to thank you, Sigurður, for your generosity and affection towards the University, its students and graduates.

The purpose of the fund is to award students and recent graduates in mathematics for their outstanding performance, and to support them in continuing their studies and research. The fund shall generally be used to grant one or two awards during the autumn, each to be given to students in mathematics at the University of Iceland who have completed the requirements for the first two years of study.

Sigurður celebrates his ninetieth birthday at the end of this month, and I would like to take the opportunity of today's joyous occasion to already wish you, dear Sigurður, all the best for your special day and the future.

I would now like to give the floor to Sigurður. Once he has finished his speech, I would like to ask Professor Ragnar Sigurðsson, Chair of the Board of the Award Fund, to preside over the festivities.

The floor is yours, Sigurður.