

Welcoming Address by Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of Iceland, on the opening of the UArctic Congress May 15 in the Aula, the Ceremonial Hall of the University of Iceland

Dear congress guests, near and far. I am Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of Iceland. On behalf of all the Icelandic organizers it is my honor to welcome you all to the UArctic Congress 2021 from the Aula, the Ceremonial Hall of the University of Iceland.

I would like to start by thanking Davíð Þór Jónsson, pianist, for his wonderful playing prior to my opening remarks. Davíð is not only a pianist but also a composer, improviser, and performing artist who has been playing the piano and keyboards since the age of 9. He has collaborated with a whole spectrum of artists covering all fields of music, both in Iceland and abroad. He has composed and arranged music for theater, film, art installations, performances and videos and – as he says himself – his main goal in music is to never stop the childlike enthusiasm and constant creativity. Davíð will play for us again during the break.

Now back to the UArctic Congress 2021. Of course, we had hoped to be able to welcome you all here in Reykjavík in person, but due to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and a different reality regarding travel, we are meeting virtually today with a limited audience attending here at the University of Iceland.

Thankfully the research community has been quick to learn new ways to interact and network during the past year. Because of this technology the UArctic Congress can still be a place to gather in order to hear about the latest research findings and to exchange new ideas, generated by the multi-disciplinary attendance for which the UArctic Congress is known. We truly appreciate your effort in joining us virtually, for keeping the discussion going on Arctic affairs, and for helping us promote cooperation in circumpolar science and higher education. By working together on innovative research, by networking and sharing ideas we can achieve a far greater impact than we can individually.

The Arctic has gained increased global importance in recent years, not least because of the rapid global environmental changes in the region and the social impact that follows. The effects of climate change pose multiple challenges in the Arctic region, not least because the Arctic is warming twice as fast as anywhere else in the world. Finding sustainable solutions to these challenges is of common interest to the whole world. The Arctic region is also interesting from the viewpoint of international relations and geopolitics, as the region spans culturally diverse communities on different continents. The growing interest of great powers in the region, with the accompanying militarization, also means that our need for experts in this field is increasing. Such challenges are an incentive for the scientific community, the business community and governments to think in terms of solutions and encourage innovation with the aim of finding ways to enhance sustainable solutions for the region.

That is what the UArctic Congress is all about, creating a platform for the exchange of ideas and visions regarding the Arctic.

I certainly look forward to hearing your discussions and learning from your insights today and in the days to come.

Now it is my pleasure to introduce **Outi Snellman**, Vice-President of Organization at the University of the Arctic, who will give **welcoming words**.

Next **Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson**, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Cooperation will provide **opening remarks**.

It is a great pleasure to introduce **Halla Hrund Logadóttir**, Director and Co-founder of the Arctic Initiative at the Kennedy School, Harvard University. Halla Hrund will now give the keynote talk in this opening session.
