

**Icelandic Canadian Relations, Past and Present
Symposium in Veröld – House of Vigdís
University of Iceland
December 5th, 2018, 3-5 pm.**

**The University of Iceland's Relations with Canada and the Stephan G. Stephansson
Endowment Fund.**

Dear Prime Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to welcome here on behalf of the University of Iceland to this event on Icelandic Canadian Relations, Past and Present.

Throughout its history, the University of Iceland has enjoyed invaluable support from members of the Icelandic community in Canada. The support has manifested itself time and again, for example in the development of our doctoral program. The support has also created the circumstances for us to both establish and cultivate significant ties with universities in Canada; circumstances which are currently enhanced by the growing demand for collaboration with the University of Iceland from universities worldwide. According to international parameters, the University of Iceland is one of the top 2% universities in the world.

In the last decade or so, we have witnessed a growing number of Canadian students at our university. In and by itself, this development is embraced by all. This particular development, however, provided us also with the marvelous opportunity to apply for a charitable status in Canada, and I am happy to report that the application was successful.

As noted by Rev. Stefan Jonasson, editor of *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, in an article on the subject in the August 15th issue of the paper, what this means is that Canadians can now donate to the university and receive income tax credit for their contributions. As well, Canadian registered charities will now be able to make contributions and grants to the University of Iceland provided that such contributions fall within their stated purposes. As noted also in the same article, the University of Iceland is now one of only 69 post-secondary institutions outside of the U.S. and U.K. that enjoy charitable status in Canada.

During the application process, the university relied on legal counsel from Blumberg Segal LLP, Toronto. I would also like to use this opportunity to thank Hjálmar W. Hannesson, Heather and Bill Ireland, and Stephan and Adriana Bendiktson for their great support, not to mention Stefan for his excellent article.

It was on June 18th this past summer that we received the good news on the charitable status, not long before I travelled to Alberta where I had the good fortune to meet with members of the Icelandic community in Calgary, Markerville and Edmonton, including Beverly Arason–Gaudet, President of the Icelandic National League (INL) of North America.

During my stay in Alberta, I also visited numerous universities and institutions to discuss collaboration. I had meetings with administrators at the University of Calgary, who expressed great interest in increased collaboration between the two universities in the fields of engineering, human and social sciences, innovation and health sciences. Elizabeth Cannon, President of the University in Calgary, joined the meeting, and Hallgrímur Benediktsson, a professor in medicine at the university, and Honorary consul for Iceland in Calgary, was present too. I also visited the University of Alberta in Edmonton, where I met with university administrators and research scientists. Between the University of Alberta and the University of Iceland, there is considerable interest in strengthening collaboration in engineering, the Nordic languages, innovation, energy research and disability studies; to name a few.

Thanks to Stephan and Adriana Benediktson, I also visited the spectacular Banff Centre for arts and creativity, where I met with its President Janice Price and other administrators, and the Icelandic artist Karlotta Blöndal, who was one of the artists-in-residence at the time of the visit.

One of the main reasons for my travels in Alberta this past summer was to introduce a certain fundraising enterprise. In 2016, the University of Iceland established an endowment fund in the name of Stephan G. Stephansson, (1853–1927), the legendary author of Icelandic literature in North America, in honour of his life and work and the profundity of his artistic expression of the experience of immigration. His grandson, Stephan Vilberg Benediktson, and his wife Adriana contributed the founding endowment in his memory.

The establishment of the Stephan G. Stephansson Endowment Fund was announced on April 20th, 2017, at the opening of this building, Veröld – hús Vigdísar, which houses the University of Iceland's Faculty of Languages and Culture and the Vigdís International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding – UNESCO Cat. 2 Centre.

The objective of the fund is to promote scholarly research in Iceland and Canada in the field of migrant and comparative literature. In order to cultivate this immensely rich field of research, the goal is to establish The Stephan G. Stephansson Professorship in Literature at the University of Iceland. With its establishment, the experience, culture and history of Icelandic immigrants in Canada will be commemorated with a rigorous and long-lasting research focus on the world's stage.

Dr. Birna Bjarnadóttir will discuss the subject in greater detail shortly in connection with Icelandic Canadian research relations. What the University of Iceland envisions is that the fundraising enterprise in question will provide us with the opportunity to further strengthen the Icelandic Canadian relations with both the Icelandic communities and Canadian universities across Canada.

Last, but not least: Our strong relations with the University of Manitoba remain intact, and I hope to see you all at the next Partnership Conference, which will be held here in Veröld on August 29–30, 2019. The subject will be migration, past and present, in reference to Canada and/or Iceland. We anticipate papers from a range of fields, including literature, language, history, museology, agriculture, engineering, and earth science, in reference to Canada and/or Iceland.