

Address by Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of Iceland, to open the symposium on Women, Leadership and the Sustainability of Languages and Cultures. Delivered in Veröld – House of Vigdís on Friday 19 November 2019 at 8 pm

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former President of Iceland; Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Prime Minister of Iceland; Dalia Grybauskaitė, former President of Lithuania and former chair of the Council of Women World Leaders; Julia Gillard, former Prime Minister of Australia; distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of Vigdís and the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute and International Centre, which are under the auspices of UNESCO and housed here at the University of Iceland, I would like to wish you all a warm welcome to the upcoming panel discussions on Women, Leadership and the Sustainability of Languages and Cultures. This event is held in connection with the Women Political Leaders Global Forum, which is taking place in Reykjavík - it started yesterday and will finish tomorrow.

We are here at the University of Iceland campus, namely at Veröld – the House of Vigdis, a building which opened in 2017 and the houses the University of Iceland's Faculty of Languages and Cultures, the Vigdis Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages and the Vigdis International Centre for multilingualism and international culture understanding.

The charge of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages is to promote and support research and development in areas that are close to Vigdís' heart: namely linguistic diversity, linguistic human rights and intercultural understanding.

The Vigdis International Centre serves the public through lecture series, film festivals, teachers' workshops and collaborations with local publishers, international writing initiatives and multilingual youth projects.

Collaboratively, the research institute and centre promote translation to and from Icelandic by supporting seasoned and novice local and international translators, as well as conducting seminars in collaboration with the National and City Theatres.

The Institute and Centre support and house several development projects aimed at supporting multilingualism and 'nano' languages, especially in the West-Nordic Region. The non-language specific platforms include open curated language courses in Icelandic and Faroese, as well as tools that enhance oral fluency and communicative skills in Danish as a second and third language in the West-Nordic region. A large French-Icelandic online dictionary is also in development.

Several nationally and internationally funded research projects are under way at the institute and Centre. These include projects that examine language contact in the West Nordic Region, Iceland, the

Faroe Islands, and Greenland funded by Nordplus; the Roma in the Centre Initiative; a newly established project focusing on the short story in translation; and other projects conducted by the members of the Institute, often with international collaboration.

The findings of these and other projects have been disseminated through a robust publishing effort by the Vigdís Institute as well as through international publications.

The Vigdís Institute hosts several international conferences each year and its members are active in the international knowledge community. The Institute and Centre are partially supported by the important Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute Support Fund which will definitely enhance the work of the Institute and Centre in the future.

Ladies and gentlemen. This evening we will enjoy an exciting panel discussion, featuring the Prime minister of Iceland, members of the Council of Women World Leaders, and the academic Irma Erlingsdóttir. These highly experienced women leaders will now share their perspectives on Vigdís' causes, with Ólöf Ragnarsdóttir, a journalist with the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service, moderating proceedings.

Thank you.