

Address by Jón Atli Benediktsson on the opening of the 76th annual conference of the International Institute of Public Finance (IIPF), "Public Finance, Natural Resources and Climate Change". Online conference opened Wednesday 19 August 2020, 8 am.

Good morning! Dear conference guests, near and far, it is my honour to welcome you to the 76th annual conference of the International Institute of Public Finance, IIPF.

This year, the conference is devoted to some of the most pressing issues of our time, bearing the title *Public Finance, Natural Resources and Climate Change*. The theme of the IIPF conference this year was determined in light of the fact that it was scheduled to take place here in Iceland – a country with a strong focus on natural resources and climate change. Iceland is a land rich in natural resources and a leading nation when it comes to using them in a sustainable way. The geographical features of the island also mean that **environmental changes such** as global warming, changes to ocean currents, rising sea levels and ocean **acidification** have a major impact on the **habitability** of the land and livelihoods of the Icelandic nation.

Nature and the environment, their use and conservation also play a major part in the academic work of the University of Iceland. The University is home to leading scientists in a range of relevant fields, e.g., earth sciences, biology, and environment and natural resources studies. The UN Sustainable Development

Goals are also a major consideration when determining strategies and operations at the University of Iceland.

As I said, the title of this conference is Public Finance, Natural Resources and Climate Change. An obvious addition to the title would be the word 'pandemics', since the topic on everyone's lips at the moment is the COVID-19 pandemic which has caused disruption in countries all over the world, with ensuing consequences for public finance. The pandemic has also made its mark on IIPF operations and is the reason this conference is being held online rather than in Reykjavík as planned. I truly hope we have an opportunity to rectify this at a later date and that we are able to welcome you here to Iceland in the near future.

Iceland is among the countries that slammed the brakes early in order to impede the spread of the virus and the Icelandic government has had the good fortune to be able to base its decisions on scientific data and advice from highly competent experts. The University of Iceland and its collaborators have made a major contribution to this effort. For example, biostatisticians at the University of Iceland have developed a detailed prediction model for the progression of the pandemic. Scientists at deCODE genetics, one of the University's major collaborative research companies, have also proven an invaluable ally to the government, screening for the virus in Iceland and at the border, both to prevent the spread of the disease and to collect data that will **support better** public

health in the future. Furthermore, economists at the University of Iceland and elsewhere have provided important work in estimating the benefits and costs of opening the borders. The public has also been actively involved in informed discussions about the pandemic and we can say that concepts such as 'public good' and '**externalities**' have become familiar in public discourse. Such terminology is not created merely to test students in exams, but first and foremost to help politicians make prudent decisions when **faced with** complex and serious challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen. Without further ado, I would like to wish you all an informative and productive **2020 IIPF** conference over the next three days.

Thank you.