

ÁVARP JÓNS ATLA BENEDIKTSSONAR REKTORS HÁSKÓLA ÍSLANDS VIÐ OPNUN
MÁLÞINGS OG UNDIRRITUN Á ENDURNÝJUÐUM SAMSTARFSSAMNINGI VIÐ
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

**“Celebrating 35 Years of a Prosperous Partnership: The University of
Minnesota and the University of Iceland”. May 29, 2017**

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former President of Iceland

President Kaler and the Delegation from University of Minnesota

Friends and colleagues,

I am delighted to welcome you here today to commemorate the thirty-fifth-year anniversary of the partnership between the University of Minnesota and the University of Iceland, a partnership that has certainly borne many fruits, not only in terms of academic impact and international prestige, but also in terms of life-changing experiences and the forging of deep friendships for so many people.

When it was first signed thirty-five years ago, our agreement with the University of Minnesota was the first of many bilateral agreements that the University of Iceland would enter into. In this way, it marked the beginning of the University’s international outlook and paved the way for future

partnerships and collaborations with foreign universities, from which we have never looked back.

What makes this partnership truly unique for us, however, is the fact that it is based on a long-standing friendship with the people of Minnesota, which goes back much further and runs far deeper than thirty-five years of student exchanges. We are as tied to Minnesota as Minnesota is to us; a link that was forged over a century ago when the first Icelanders settled in Minnesota and made it their home. Most did not return, but by continually maintaining ties with their homeland, and by supporting exchanges between our two Universities, they find their way home.

At a milestone like today, it is good to look back thirty-five years – and reflect on how far we have come. On a personal note, in 1982, I was an undergraduate engineering student here at the University of Iceland, just embarking on my academic path which would later bring me to the United States for graduate studies. I went to the Midwest, although not to Minnesota but rather to Purdue University in Indiana, where I lived for several years. Later I had the great pleasure of visiting Minnesota-St. Paul several times, including a couple of visits to the University of Minnesota.

Thirty-five years ago, the University of Iceland was first and foremost an undergraduate institution, with only thirty-five-hundred students. At that time, if students were interested in continuing their studies and go on to graduate school, they had no choice but to go abroad.

In the early nineties the University of Iceland moved on its path to become an International Research University, introducing graduate studies and increased focus on research. Now, we have grown to have 13,000 students; 8,500 undergraduate students and 4500 graduate students with about 500 PhD students. This includes 1400 international students from over 90 countries. Some of them are exchange students that come here, like the students from Minnesota, on the basis of a cooperative agreement between universities, but the vast majority are full time degree- seeking students. I am happy to tell you that recently US students became the most numerous of all international nationalities at the University of Iceland. This of course goes hand in hand with the internationalization of the curriculum at the University of Iceland. We still teach mainly in our native language, Icelandic, but offer single courses in English as well as graduate degrees taught in English. We appreciate this development of the student body, and

welcome international students at our university. International students indeed add diversity and charm to our academic environment.

Dear guests

Thirty-five years ago, the agreement with the University of Minnesota was the very first bilateral agreement that we signed with an international university. We can without doubt say that this was the first step, and a very significant step towards the extensive international collaboration and cooperation in research and education that the University of Iceland is now involved in. We now have agreements with over 500 universities worldwide. Our researchers collaborate with scientists all over the world and publish extensively with international co-authorship. This has been crucial in establishing the University of Iceland as an International Research University, and an important factor in moving the University up international rankings. We are no longer the small undergraduate school we were thirty-five years ago, but are currently ranked among the top 250 universities in the world by the Times Higher Education World University Rankings.

The University of Iceland and the University of Minnesota have collaborated extensively over the years in research and teaching, especially in the fields of Nursing, Health Sciences and Education, but there are many more opportunities to collaborate in other fields, such as Engineering, Natural Sciences Social Sciences and Humanities. Today we will have the opportunity to hear about some of the collaboration between the University of Iceland and the University of Minnesota, and the possible future collaboration in other fields.

Dear friends and colleagues, this tradition of celebrating the renewal of our agreement every five years is unique and highly cherished. I hope that we will continue this tradition in the years to come. I thank you for coming to the Iceland, and hope that you will have an enjoyable stay.