

Welcoming speech by Ms. Gudfridur Lilja Gretarsdottir

Distinguished Guests, Dear Friends of the Arctic.

It is my honour to join Her Excellency Madame Speaker of Althingi, Asta Ragnheidur Johannesdottir, in wishing you all welcome to Iceland, and to Akureyri, the home of so many different Arctic activities and impressive scientific work, a place which, today, welcomes you with a beauty befitting a birthday child.

Just a few years ago we could all hear on the international media, all around the world, that Iceland was going under. To whichever station you tuned into – the BBC or the CNN or the Kringvarp or the Al Jazeera – the story was everywhere the same: for Iceland, it was more or less over. Back in secret chambers of government people actually asked the question if there would be enough medicine. A distinguished American economist advised – your first priority is to make sure that people do not starve. These were dramatic times.

But here we are. Welcoming all of you. The sun still rises. The mountains still embrace us. And the sea still falls to the shore, making its sound of music as if nothing has happened. And no one is asking those questions anymore. Or giving this kind of advice.

Perseverance. If there is one word that perhaps encapsulates the spirit of the North, the extreme conditions, the dramatic scenery, the hostile and yet, attractive living, the multiple cultural gifts of the Arctic, so enduring in their fragility, it is perhaps this, perseverance. And we are here together, burdened with the calling of our times, to help make the Arctic persevere – perhaps, against all odds.

As your hosts, we would like you to dine well and to sleep well. We would like you to enjoy good conversation and laugh and build new bridges, and perhaps even learn a little. We would like you to speak and we would like you to listen, and we also hope you to take the opportunity get to know our country a little better.

But in the end, the success of this conference will not be measured by what goes on during these three days here in Akureyri; it will be measured by what we take back home with us, each and every one of us. It will be marked by how determined we are, across borders, as fellow parliamentarians, at a time of great drama in the life of our planet, to actually go home and put what we say and proclaim, into action. Ours is, and continues to be, an opportunity to actually make a bit of a difference.

It is a privilege to have such an opportunity, and it is a privilege to have you all here. On behalf of the Icelandic delegation to the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, I wish you an enjoyable stay and a memorable message to take home,

thank you.