



**Address
by President of Iceland
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson
at a state dinner hosted by
Her Excellency Governor General Mary Simon and
Mr. Whit Fraser
during a state visit to Canada**

**Ottawa
29 May 2023**

Esteemed Governor General Mary Simon,
Mr. Whit Fraser,
Prime Minister Justin Trudeau,
Madame Sophie Grégoire Trudeau,
ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of my wife Eliza and myself, and our delegation on this visit to Canada, I want to thank you sincerely for the warm welcome we have received. We look forward to further events, both here in Ottawa and elsewhere in Ontario, and also in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and St. John's in Newfoundland. The Blue Economy and northern regions, high technology, and ways of improving the lives of young people; we will learn about all these subjects and many more during our stay in your country.

I must apologise that I can only address you in English here – and not in French, nor, Your Excellency, in your mother tongue, Inuktitut. The future of languages is one of the subjects we will be discussing during this visit. There are still some Canadians of Icelandic descent who speak the language of their foremothers and -fathers, who made their homes in Canada more than a century ago. And the bond of friendship between Iceland and Canada has always been strong.

And now we Icelanders want to strengthen and support our language in this digital age, in a globalised world. We often maintain that Icelandic has remained largely unchanged for a thousand years, and we always strive to find Icelandic neologisms for new inventions and

concepts – for instance our word for *computer* is *tölva*, created by combining the word for number, *tala*, with *völva*, which means a prophet.

Despite our efforts, Icelandic may still be said to lack important elements of vocabulary. Which brings to mind the qualities of invariable courtesy, warmth and neighbourliness for which you Canadians are renowned. I don't say that we Icelanders are entirely devoid of such virtues, but what we don't have is that word you Canadians use all day long – and we don't – the word *please*. Icelandic has no word for *please*!

But we work together. Eliza and I have been living in Iceland for about twenty years, and she has made the effort to learn Icelandic, with excellent results. But one time she intended to say that she was grateful, *þakklát* in Icelandic, but inadvertently mispronounced that vowel and said *þakk-löt*. The word doesn't exist, but it certainly could; the literal meaning is *thanks-lazy*: too lazy to say thanks.

We certainly would not like to be deemed *thanks-lazy* here. We are full of gratitude for your hospitality and goodwill. Yes, we will enjoy travelling around this great and bounteous land, Canada, and getting to know the fine people who live here, and return home with new knowledge and cherished memories.

And perhaps we may learn some new words. I recall now, your Excellency, our interesting conversations when you visited Iceland last year. Among other things we talked about the position of indigenous peoples here in Canada. In past times we Icelanders, and others who recounted stories of Norse voyages to North America more than a thousand years ago, maintained that the explorers had found all but virgin, uninhabited territory. Those journeys were remarkable in their own way, but no less remarkable is the history of the people who had come here long before the Norse, and remain here today, despite the many setbacks and afflictions they have endured. Perhaps we should all learn, and keep in mind, the Inuktitut word *ajuinnata*, which means the determination never to give up, always to persevere in face of adversity. And we Icelanders know many tales about helpful indigenous people who taught the new Icelandic settlers how to survive the frigid Canadian winters.

In the spirit of that long-standing bond, let us continue to strengthen the relationship between Iceland and Canada, pursue our shared interests and defend our common values, at home and around the world.

Dear guests! I ask you all to stand and lift your glasses in honour of the Governor-General of Canada, her husband, and all the people of this wonderful country.