Address
by the President of Iceland
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson
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Is hydrogen our energy carrier for the future? Can it be produced in Iceland? Can it then be shipped over to users in other countries? And can we do all this in a sustainable and environmentally friendly manner? Can we produce energy and protect nature at the same time? Yes, we can. And yes, we must. But then we need you. We need the scientists and the CEOs. We need the politicians and other key players.

We need this because we need to accelerate our energy transition. We have to to move away from fossil fuels, seek greener solutions, reduce our CO2 emissions the best we can.

We need to seek solutions for the present and the future, we need to work together. That is why we have gathered here in Paris, at this green hydrogen symposium. I thank the organizers of this great event, and I also thank our good hosts for their kindness and expertise.

Yes, we need to look ahead but let the past be our guide. Come with me to the island in the north that people from Scandinavia and the British Isles settled in some eleven or twelve hundred years ago. Immediately, the utilization of resources began. The newcomers had to heat their dwellings. They used peat and they chopped wood until little of it was left, and that increased soil erosion. It looks like a classic case of overexploitation – let that be warning to us when we discuss the utilization of energy resources.

At the same time, people enjoyed the pleasures of warm water. In 999, or possibly a year later, Icelandic chieftains convened at the Althing by Lake Þingvallavatn and agreed that the Christian faith should be adopted in the country. However, some of them declined to be baptized in the cold water there or then, preferring hot springs on the way home.

They did not know it then, but some thousand years later we Icelanders witnessed a revolution in energy transition. During the twentieth century, we stopped using coal and oil to heat our homes, turning to our geothermal resources instead. At

the same time, we began harnessing our waterfalls to produce energy, as well as the heat underground.

Dear friends: We are a small nation, we Icelanders. We must be careful when we tell others about our past success and future potential. There is a thin line between empty words and action, and there is a thin line between self-confidence and bragging. Sometimes we must also resist our temptation to quote per capita statistics. I sometimes think we Icelanders know more per capita statistics than all other nations – per capita!

Even so, I am tempted to point out that we hold the world record for the share of renewable sources in our energy production. Moreover, we produce more energy than most others, per capita. We can of course debate how desirable that is, but at least it is green energy, and the world needs more of that.

And now we are looking at hydrogen. The know-how is there. We know how to use electric current to split water into hydrogen and oxygen – or at least many of you do know this!

Furthermore, we know that Iceland and France have a long history of fruitful cooperation in the fields of science and education. We will always value that when the University of Iceland was founded 110 years ago, the French authorities offered valuable support. The maxim of that university is clear and as appropriate now as it was then: "Science advances all our deeds". And these words have a French connection. They come from an ode in honour of one of France's most renowned explorers and scientists, Paul Gaimard. Come briefly with me to Iceland in the 1830s when monsieur Gaimard climbed mount Hekla, the volcano that was called the gateway to hell in earlier times. There he stood, as his friend Jónas Hallgrímsson wrote in one of his wonderful poems, admiring the beauty and ruggedness of this island in the middle of the open sea:

> Standing on Hekla's stony height
> you stared at braided rivers gleaming
> over the peaceful plains and streaming
> out to an ocean broad and bright.
>
> (English translation: Dick Ringler)

Of course, Gaimard could not have foreseen that much later we learned to generate energy by harnessing the rivers and the forces beneath mount Hekla, our geothermal resources. But with clever anticipation, Jónas also wrote in his poem: "a host from Iceland greets you, knowing / Frenchmen will never fail in showing / love for a land as free as ours."

Dear friends: Faced with a global pandemic, we have witnessed the vitality of science, the importance of medical and scientific research, remedy and progress. And faced with a climate crisis, we know that science can provide some of the necessary solutions there as well. Green hydrogen is certainly one of them. I wish you all good luck on that journey.