



**Address  
by President of Iceland  
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson  
for Icelanders' Day,  
Íslendingadagurinn, 1-3 August 2021**

Kæru Vestur-Íslendingar!

Dear Canadians and Americans of Icelandic origin

On behalf of the people of Iceland, I send you all my warmest greetings on Íslendingadagurinn. Over here, we join you in celebrating the strong bond that exists between us.

The Icelanders who ventured from this island to a new world in the nineteenth century wanted a new life. Many saw no hope here, no means to show themselves and others what they could achieve, no means to turn dreams into reality.

We believe that they were usually apprehensive but they were also optimistic. And once these Icelanders were in North America, they often encountered hardship and misery. Apprehension even turned into anger, optimism to pessimism. But people persevered and, overall, this is a story we should recall with pride. Still, we should also recount it with candour. We should not try to install and maintain a glorified and authorized version of the past. For if we attempt that, we might be caught out in the end – indeed, we should be caught out.

Last year, Íslendingadagurinn was marked by the pandemic that has affected us all. This summer, Canada Day was marked by discoveries of burial sites at residential schools for Indigenous children. At the Canadian Embassy in Reykjavík, the flag has flown at half mast. All Canadians should learn about this horrific chapter of Canadian history and continue to work towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

In that spirit, we can still celebrate Íslendingadagurinn, the day of the Icelanders in Canada and the United States. We must allow ourselves to value

the positive aspects of patriotism, a love for one's country and society, the decent aspects of its culture and history.

Here in Iceland, we appreciate our literary heritage, our Sagas, our poetry. Ingibjörg Haraldsdóttir's poem Land expresses our reverence for our country, our language, our people, yet without hubris or arrogance. It goes like this in English translation:

I tell you nothing of the land  
I sing no patriotic songs  
of the caves, the waterfalls, the hot springs  
the ewes and the cows  
of the people's struggles  
and adversities in perilous weather  
no. But stand by me  
in the dark. Breathe deeply  
and feel it flow  
and say:  
This is my home.home.

And this is what we should all be able to say with pride and joy, that we have a common home that we can cherish together, despite our different origins.

Dear friends: Eliza, my Canadian wife, and I hope to join you at Íslendingadagurinn in the future. Congratulations on this fine event. Til hamingju með daginn!