

**ÁVARP FORSÆTISRÁÐHERRA VIÐ OPNUN HRINGBORÐS NORÐURSLÓÐA Í  
HÖRPU 19. OKTÓBER**

Mr. Chairman of the Arctic Circle, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, former President of Iceland,

Excellencies, distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It's an honour to be here with you today.

Time of promises and good intentions has passed. Actions are needed now. The world was presented earlier this month with yet another important warning about the dire consequences of climate change. We have 12 years to limit a potential climate change catastrophe to hit full force. With continued course of path, the world is heading for a disastrous 3 degrees warming – which would take humanity and all life on earth into uncharted and dangerous territory.

We, who are gathered here today and the world as a whole, must take this sobering landmark report from the UN Panel on Climate Change very seriously. We can no longer afford to stick our heads in the sand. It is time for serious action and we need everybody to be on board. This is not being an alarmist. This is looking the unpleasant truth in the eye. I would like to make it absolutely clear – the scientific knowledge is out there – there is no need to debate that any longer. Now we must act.

We may not like what we hear. We may not like to change our ways. But we don't have a choice. The Paris agreement pledged to keep temperatures between 1.5 and 2 degrees. The IPCC report tells us that even half a degree more than 1.5 will significantly increase the risk of disastrous droughts, floods, extreme weather with dire consequences for hundreds of millions of people. It will make life on earth unbearable for millions of our brothers and sisters around the world.

The pressure on the Arctic will increase significantly. The Arctic has been warming up twice as much as the global average. The seas are warming and

acidifying. The ice is retreating. Scientists predict there may be virtually no summer sea-ice in the Arctic within a generation.

Climate change is the most important challenge of humankind, and demands cooperation and action by all: Government, industry and the general public. We need a clear political will as well as the full participation of society to take this challenge on successfully.

By now I have probably ruined your good mood and you are wondering why you decided to show up for this conference at all.

So then let us talk about what we can do about this situation. Because this is not simply gloom and doom. We CAN actually do something about the situation.

The fact is, that we all need to do our share. Every one of us. So, my government has decided to rise to the challenge and has promised to decrease carbon emission in Iceland by 40% by the year 2030 and to become carbon neutral by the year 2040. On top of that, we must honor our international commitments already made– and most likely we must do more.

Last September, my government launched a new Climate Action Plan consisting of 34 concrete actions, ranging from an increase in reforestation, land reclamation and wetland restoration to a ban on new registration of fossil fuel cars by 2030. The plan aims to transform the transportation system from using imported fossil fuels to a carbon-free system run on renewable energy, of which we are fortunate enough to have plenty of.

In Iceland we have more than 100 years experience in reclaiming land and fighting desertification, with impressive results. We will increase considerably our efforts in carbon sequestration, which is essential for Iceland's aim to achieve carbon neutrality by 2040. An important part of our strategy is the period of consultation with industry, municipalities and civil society on how to implement the strategy and individual actions. Furthermore, the plan will also be subject to public consultation, and an updated Strategy will be published in 2019, taking into account comments and suggestions by civil society.

The leading role of government in this matter is essential. However, the part played by the private sector and the public is paramount. Here we need to see a paradigm shift – both in how we do business as well as in public behavior. This boils down to our everyday life – and the choices we make.

We who live in the arctic are not exempt from this reality. The effects of climate change are here for all to see and we need to take action as does the rest of the world.

The Arctic is crucial for so many important reasons. It is not only a home to a spectacular and unique wildlife, as well as four million people – but it also helps keep the world's climate in balance.

The Arctic is a key foreign policy priority for Iceland and we therefore look forward to assuming the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council from Finland in May 2019.

The importance of conservation and sustainable use of the ocean is paramount. Climate change is one of the greatest threats to the ocean today. Increase of temperature and ocean acidification will put the entire marine ecosystem at risk. The only way to turn this around is by cutting down greenhouse gas emissions.

The Arctic may seem a bit chilly for some of us here. But for the four million people, including indigenous communities, spread across eight countries – this is home. Both the people and the incredible wildlife of the region have equally adapted to an environment that would prove difficult for most to survive in. Their voice is important and needs to be heard in every decision we make concerning the future of the Arctic. We need to listen, to pay attention to the voices of the people in Arctic – they are the most vulnerable and least resilient to the effects of climate change.

This unique life and nature of the area, is a part of the incredible diversity of our planet.

While the significance of the Arctic on the international stage has increased in recent year we must make sure it never becomes a geopolitical hot-spot. We should aim to maintain the Arctic as an area of exemplary international cooperation, where we come together to work towards the Sustainable Development Goals: to protect the planet and to ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. This can only be realized with a strong commitment to global partnership and cooperation. And that is why we must make the Arctic a demilitarized zone.

The Arctic Circle provides an important venue for a constructive dialogue between the diverse actors that care about region. As a matter of fact, the Arctic Circle Assembly has become one of the biggest venues for discussions

and exchanging ideas on the many important issues of the Arctic region – whether they be related to climate change, environmental protection or sustainable development.

We should take good care to nurture this kind of international cooperation, and I firmly believe that our common interest is better served that way.

I wish you a successful 6th Arctic Circle Assembly.

Thank you.