

25th Opening Ceremony of the United Nations University Geothermal Training Programme

Address by Foreign Minister Halldor Asgrimsson

Rector of the United Nations University, Mr. Hans van Ginkel, Director of the UNU Geothermal Training Programme, Mr. Ingvar Birgir Friðleifsson, dear UNU fellows, ladies and gentlemen. It gives me great pleasure to address you all here today at this opening ceremony of the United Nations University Geothermal Training Programme. This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of this programme. I am therefore particularly pleased that Mr. Hans van Ginkel, Rector of the United Nations University, is with us here today.

But first of all, I would like to welcome the 20 experts that have come all the way to Iceland to work hard in the coming months to enhance their knowledge in the field of geothermal energy utilisation. I am confident that not only our scientists here in Iceland will be able to help you increase your know-how in this field, but also that our scientists will learn a lot from you as well. You are very welcome to Iceland and I sincerely hope that your stay and work here will be of benefit to you personally as well as to your countries - and Iceland. When you have finished your programme, a total number of about 300 graduates from around 30 countries, we will have graduated from the UNU Geothermal Training Programme since the beginning in 1979. And during this period, we have made a lot of friends from many different countries.

The Icelandic Government has over the years placed a special emphasis on the Geothermal Training Programme. Thus, the financial contribution to the Programme is the largest contribution that Iceland gives to any UN agency. As you all know, the importance of the utilisation of renewable energy resources is high on our agenda in the world today. The need for new energy solutions is becoming more and more evident. Iceland has for decades emphasised the sustainable development of geothermal energy and hydropower. Utilization of such renewable energy resources is an indispensable part of our common endeavour to secure sustainable development and economic progress in all parts of the world. In this respect an important step was taken at the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development last year, where Iceland stressed the importance of the utilisation of renewable energy resources. The success of the Summit, however, will not be measured by the commitments that were given, but by the actions that follow. And this is perhaps where your own contribution can play a part. Not only will your highly specialised studies and training hopefully contribute to the prosperity and well-being of your countries but also enhance the understanding and promote the idea of the concerted global efforts needed to aim for sustainable development.

The utilisation of renewable energy resources in this country is in a way based on our wish to be able to defend us against the tough climate by harnessing the forces of nature to defend ourselves against the same forces. As an island nation, we are very much aware of how vulnerable we can be with regard to import of energy. In this regard I would like to mention to you that Iceland has taken the issue of renewable energy utilisation a step further by setting itself the goal of becoming the first economy in the world to be self-sufficient in terms of sustainable energy production and consumption. To this end, Iceland is taking a very active part in hydrogen cell technology research. Only a few days ago, the first hydrogen pump station in the world, designed to pump hydrogen fuel to ordinary vehicles powered by

hydrogen, was opened here in the city of Reykjavík. Soon, three municipal buses in this city will be powered by hydrogen.

I know that most of you, who come here to study, come from countries with friendlier climate than we have. But I am confident that the knowledge and training you will acquire by participating in the UNU Geothermal Training Programme will nevertheless be of use to your countries. Geothermal energy can certainly be used for other things than defending us against bad weather by heating up our homes! I sincerely hope that your learning here will be fruitful and that you can make the most of it.

Allow me finally to use this opportunity to share with you some of the future ideas we have for our UNU programmes in Iceland. During the last eight years, the Icelandic Government has almost doubled its contributions to development assistance. We regard our UNU programmes, the Geothermal Training Programme and the Fisheries Training Programme as some of the best development projects we support. We believe that Iceland can contribute in both fields and possibly other fields as well. Iceland has over the years devoted considerable time and resources into developing the utilisation of renewable natural resources. We are willing and also proud to be able to share our know-how and expertise with you.

We are now considering whether we need to reorganise and possibly expand the UNU programmes in order to strengthen their position in our own institutional structure and at the same time to give them higher profile within the UN system. New institutional arrangements could be key to that intention. I have therefore decided to set up a working group to further develop new ideas that have been brought to our table. Based on its recommendations, a final decision will be taken. I believe there is a momentum now to strengthen our support to the UNU and at the same time make better use of our own resources. Last, but not least, let me wish you all the best during your training period here in Iceland which will hopefully not only result in the enhancement of your professional skills but also leave you with good memories of an Icelandic summer to bring home with you.