



**Speech by  
the President of Iceland  
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson  
at the 20th Graduation Ceremony  
of the UNU Fisheries Training Programme**

**26. February 2018**

Dear Friends:

It is a great pleasure for me to join you on this graduation ceremony which is also an opportunity to celebrate a twenty years anniversary for the United Nations Fisheries Training Programme in Iceland.

Well over 300 fellows have now graduated from the Programme, who have returned to their home countries that have huge opportunities in enhancing their fishing industry. The organization of this programme is remarkable and is based on careful selection of candidates, on close co-operation with the partner countries who come from institutions that include both ocean-related government bodies and academic institutions. The Programme has also expanded by offering courses in other countries and by adding new areas and perspectives, including fish farming and the emphasis on sustainable catching practices.

As you know, fishing was for many centuries an important industry in Iceland, but its role was secondary to agriculture which was seen by the inhabitants as the most important economic sector of the country. During the 20th century this changed and with industrialization, clever engineering and marketing, ocean fisheries became the key to the increasingly strong economy. In the second half of the 20th century the role of fish and fish processing in our economy kept growing and as the so-called ‘cod wars’, i.e. the disputes we had with our neighbouring countries about the fishing zones around our island, were closely related to the fact that fishing was quintessential for Iceland as an independent

state. New processing and marketing skills along with new technologies aboard the fishing vessels have contributed to a remarkable development: Even if the total weight of the cod we catch has diminished by a half since 1984, the market value of the cod we catch has more than doubled.

For some people fishing is essentially a primitive undertaking where you rely on luck and do not have to prepare a lot. In that sense fishing can be put into the category of what anthropologists would call 'hunting and gathering' and deem as a past stage in human development.

But even if fishing has a lot in common with hunting, there are two crucial features that can make it a sensible and profitable modern industry: It is adding high-tech features both to the fishing vessels and the processing, and it is making sure that catching volume is controlled so as to guarantee that the fishing is sustainable. With more advanced technology and more control you increase the predictability in this industry.

Both these prerequisites are knowledge-intensive. To modernize the vessels and the processing you need a lot of skills, and to measure and protect the fish stocks you also need good training. And this is exactly why the UNU Fisheries Training Programme is so important.

If we think about what may be ahead in the fisheries sector we must certainly understand the pending problems. FAO has estimated that about 90% of exploited fish stocks are either overfished or fully fished. And changes in the acidity and temperature of the oceans can lead to big changes for the maritime species with some of them migrating to other areas.

These are formidable problems, of course, and they can be solved above all by people who have the initiative and energy to acquire advanced training just like you graduates have done.

I hope the experience and education you have received in Iceland will be of value for you personally and that you will make a positive impact on your community.

Congratulations to you all!