



75TH ANNIVERSARY OF UNESCO

Address by the President of Iceland Guðni Th. Jóhannesson

**Paris
12 November 2021**

Dear all

Education and equality. Science and freedom. Arts and culture. For 75 years, UNESCO has supported and strengthened these pillars of progressive societies. For 75 years, UNESCO has been a venue and vehicle for positive change. Still, there is much that we could have done even better, and much work remains ahead of us.

For long, the agency has advanced the freedom of expression, in media, in arts and sciences, in all walks of life, freedom of religion, freedom from hate speech, prejudice and violence, freedom of love. To be sure, at the time of its foundation, the rights of the LGBTI community were not high on UNESCO's agenda – actually, they were not there at all. We live and learn.

Likewise, we should continue to advance gender equality, a fundamental basis for justice and growth. Gender equality is not only a human rights issue but a practical one. Gender equality benefits everyone. The more gender equal a society is, the more happy and healthy its people are, and peaceful and prosperous as well.

And, dear friends, education is always the essence of our efforts, education and empathy. Recently, Fawzia Koofi, the Afghan politician and women's rights activist visited my home country and said of the new rulers in her country: "They are not afraid of bombs or rockets, they are afraid of education, especially girls education."

We have entered our Decade of Action. We want to accelerate sustainable solutions to our biggest challenges, poverty and hunger, inequality and climate change to name a few. In this task, UNESCO can play a vital role and let me

finish by quoting a translation of an Icelandic poem on action and responsibility
– for we in Iceland, just like others, love poetry and literature:

For when there is wrong that you can put right
and when there is struggle but you stand aside
the troubles of this world are also your fault.

Again, I wish all member states and the staff of UNESCO a happy 75th
anniversary. Thanks for everything that you have done. Good luck in the future.