



**Address
by President of Iceland
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson
at the beginning of a volcanic eruption
at Grindavík
14 January 2024**

Good evening, People of Iceland.

What we all hoped would not happen has come to pass. It has come to pass that lava is flowing into Grindavík, a thriving town where people have built their lives, engaged in fishing and other occupations and created a community in harmony with God and one another.

We continue to hope for as good an outcome as possible, in the face of these tremendous forces of nature. A few months ago the town was successfully evacuated after a frightening series of earthquakes. And now saving lives must remain the priority. For this reason, my thoughts and the thoughts of others are with the loved ones of Lúðvík Pétursson, the man who went missing after a work-related accident in Grindavík last week.

We don't yet know how this eruption will unfold, but we must still take those actions that are within our power. We will carry on with our responsibilities and we will continue to stand together. We will act out of empathy, compassion and solidarity.

Yes, we shall continue to hold those in our thoughts who have not been able to live in their own homes, those who have had to watch the lava flow through and around their community. I'd like to thank those who have offered shelter to the people of Grindavík and have come to their aid in other ways, both large and small. I am also grateful to all those who have worked at the scene of these exceptional events, as well as the team of outstanding scientists who are poring over the data as they become available.

People of Iceland: This is not the first time we have been made to respond to a volcanic catastrophe. This month marks fifty-one years since the great

eruption in Heimaey. It was the last time lava flowed over Iceland's homes, and at that time President Kristján Eldjárn said: "It takes less than this disaster for Icelanders to realize that this small nation is more like a large family that knows whatsoever happens to one of us, happens to all of us."

These words still ring true. When we find ourselves in dire straits, we Icelanders stand together. Without a doubt, the people of Grindavík and all of us hope that this disaster will soon subside, that soon people will be able to return home.

Although we now find ourselves in turmoil, we must hold onto hope. In some cases, this hope may be based in faith. Lava once spilled out over the Vestmannaeyjar islands and ash covered the community. But the lychgate at the church there didn't burn. The words "I live and you all will live" stood on the gate and stand to this day.

But our hope may also be based on reason, on scientific knowledge and our ability to stay one step ahead of the forces of nature, despite it all. "What angered the gods so, when the lava flowed where we now stand?" This was the answer given by the chieftain Snorri Þorgrímsson when it was claimed at Þingvellir over a thousand years ago that the gods had shown their anger towards Christians by causing lava to flow over the settlements.

People of Iceland. Since that time we have overcome various hardships, generation after generation, all the while enjoying the blessings of this county, this strikingly beautiful country. We now wait and hope and take things as they come. And now all our plans for the future must take into account that a daunting period of upheaval has begun on the Reykjanes peninsula. The people of Grindavík have proven their composure and resilience: it is a duty that befalls us all to ensure that they can continue to show themselves and others what they are made of, that they can again make a home, enjoy a sense of safety and allow themselves to look forward to a bright future. This we will accomplish together, we the people of Iceland. Indeed, we shall stay the course.