



**Address
by President of Iceland
Halla Tómasdóttir
at the Iceland Space Agency
public outreach event**

2 September 2024

Mission director, Daniel Leeb,
space scientists
and other guests:

It is an honor to welcome representatives of the world's most esteemed space agencies to this historic meeting in Iceland.

Exploration, research and innovation are fundamental to advancing humanity's future and history has shown us that „moonshots” matter. Indeed, they may very well bring out the best in us, not just in terms of advancing science and technology, but also in harnessing humanity's most important capacities such as creativity, courage, collaboration and compassion – for the very earth we collectively call our home.

As ISA's mission-director Daniel Leeb puts it “Our exploration of space is key to further understanding of our own planet.” There are those who might find your mission “to advance our collective human and robotic future on Mars” bold – if not audacious. I have at times had my own doubts about investing time and money into the exploration of space when we have so many problems right here on earth. I have actively uplifted the need for an Earthshot – calling on governments, business, scientists and other innovators to help solve our complex challenges with a „moonshot mentality”.

But the scientific fact is that we need not choose between the two. The very challenges we must overcome in order to reach Mars may indeed spur the solutions needed to tackle climate change, spur a food revolution and help create sustainable growth. Hence, we should all be both Moonshotters / Marsshotters as well as Earthshotters and collaborate deeply and bravely to help advance both

the artificial and human technologies that can make what may now seem impossible – possible!

Some may question the role of our small nation when it comes to the grand mission you come together to further – I do not. It is my humble view that Iceland can punch above its size and weight when it comes to solving challenges. Indeed, I believe our purpose is to be a land of solutions. We have proven to be when it comes to geothermal energy and gender equality, so why not in space solutions? After all, we offer terrain that is similar to what we might encounter on the Moon and Mars. During the dawn of the space age, in 1965 and 1967, Iceland was an important location for the testing of technology, research, and astronaut training.

Since the Apollo era, space agencies and planetary scientists have continued to visit Iceland due to our diverse “terrestrial analogs”. We can also offer benefit, expertise and insights when it comes to Artificial Intelligence, Astro-Agriculture, sustainable energy platforms, STEM education, Mobility platforms and more.

Perhaps one of our contributions to the Artemis space era can be to help support the goal of putting a woman on Mars. Iceland inspired the world back in 1980 by being the first country to democratically elect a woman as president and for 15 years we have led the world when it comes to closing the gender gap, so we fully support the criticality of showing young people all over the world that women, too, make great rocket scientists and astronauts. Aiming for gender-balance in advancing both human and artificial intelligence offers in my mind’s eye the key to a livable planet and a future where all of humanity can thrive.

Dear scientists and space agencies, I wish you every success in your brave mission and thank you for choosing Iceland for your very important meeting. I know we offer both the physical and human resources to nurture the creativity, courage, collaboration and compassion needed to put a woman on Mars before the end of this decade. That is a mission we should all unite behind.