



**Ceremonial address  
by President of Iceland  
Halla Tómasdóttir  
on Iceland's National Day**

**Austurvöllur, Reykjavík  
17 June 2025**

My dear fellow-Icelanders, Happy National Day!

I am delighted to be with you on this fine summer day.

This is the first time that the president of Iceland addresses the nation from Austurvöllur on 17 June – this day which has such a special place in the minds of both younger and older generations. This day brings out the child in many of us who are of mature years. We recall the times we spent with our parents, grandparents and others – people who accompanied us at the start of our lives. Some of them may no longer be with us, but at moments of togetherness like this, they return to us in memory. Our minds conjure up images: a little child, with one hand clasped in a trusted bigger hand, the other clutching a balloon or an Icelandic flag. Each of us has our own image in our mind's eye of the National Days of childhood.

Like others, I have my concerns about the state of the world, and I am aware that there is much in the world which may lead us to lose hope. It is far from encouraging to be witness to virulent disputes on social media – which are far from admirable, not least when those involved include some of the most powerful people in the world, who ought to be setting a good example. It is even more heart-rending – sadder than words can say – to observe, almost in real time, civilians, among them thousands of children, falling victim to warfare and crime. It is a sad truth that in our time when people are always online, with unrestricted access to a wide range of information, growing numbers of people should be experiencing feelings of distrust, isolation and loneliness. The world is certainly far from perfect. Even in our peaceful little country, the rage

expressed can become so vehement that some people simply give up and turn their backs on the news – preferring to close their eyes, rather than continuing to witness such distressing material. Others isolate themselves in an echo chamber of their own views and attitudes. We must face up to the situation: build bridges, find our compass and roll up our sleeves.

Awareness of challenging issues does not, however, trump my belief that these turbulent times offer us opportunities to do better. I am convinced that this is so, for in my work I am fortunate enough to encounter innumerable people who step forward in the name of love. They are everywhere around us – these altruistic individuals who often maintain a low profile, while doing good deeds every single day. As I have said before, I choose to call these people Knights of Love – and I reiterate that anyone can join their company. Then there are the children: heralds of the future. I observe their stoicism, their curiosity and creativity; and they remind us that we live in a society which is still very young. We are just embarking on our journey as a sovereign republic: curious, sometimes a little too keen on novelties, but also bursting with energy. But children are sometimes fearful and lonely. They need support, love and care – and they are comforted when they feel that they belong to something bigger than themselves. And that is true of all of us, no matter our age.

The future will always take us by surprise. It is inherently full of uncertainty. It will bring both good fortune and bad, positive news and negative. But the most important thing is that we take on our challenges in unity, and continue to be a land of creative solutions in face of complex issues; improvements in society and enrichment of the spirit. Ahead of us lies such a great future. We are at the start of our journey. Imagine all that lies ahead: the films we will make, the stories we will write, the plays we will premiere, the businesses we will found, the good deeds we will do. Just imagine that next year, forty years after the historic summit meeting in Höfði House when the US and Soviet leaders began face-to-face discussions on disarmament, we could once again be a forum for a dialogue about peace: and this is indeed a moment that calls for that. Despite all the achievements in our history, I know that our greatest achievements lie ahead. Imagine the child, who is now somewhere among us, who in later years will stand on stage and sing for the world, and bring us together once again with new nuances of words and music. That child is already in the world, and within every one of us dwells that child, who simply longs to flourish on their own terms.

I have faith in our nation, and in all that we have achieved. When our campaign for self-determination commenced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many people saw the ambition for an independent Iceland as unrealistic dream. Yet here we are – a sovereign nation for an entire century, an independent republic for a human lifetime – with a list of achievements in which we can justly take pride.

This year we celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Theatre of Iceland. It may once have seemed a grandiose objective for one of the poorest nations in Europe to build a magnificent edifice in which to present its stories and creative energies. The construction of the National Theatre was delayed by the Depression of the 1930s, followed by World War II, but ultimately the building was completed, and formally opened within a few years of the foundation of the Republic of Iceland. Much the same is true of our concert hall Harpa, which now glitters on the quayside here in Reykjavík, after delays arising from the financial crisis of 2008. Harpa is now home to the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, which also celebrates its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year; the foundation of the orchestra is one of our long list of achievements as a nation. We have ambition in the cultural field – for creativity is our strongest attribute – creativity and love.

Few of the inhabitants of our planet live in circumstances where the land beneath their feet is still in process of formation. We Icelanders have a diverse country, that presents us with innumerable manifestations of the forces of nature: warm summer days and wild winter storms – a nature that both gives and takes, and demands hard work and resilience. Here in Iceland, what we see is new every day – new hues, a refreshing breeze. We live in an environment that demands that we should constantly be making something new, with an open heart.

Every day I see examples of the potency of creativity. It overcomes all barriers. I recently presented Tinna Gunnlaugsdóttir and her husband Egill Ólafsson with an award for their contribution to cinematic art. The couple have also greatly enriched Icelandic theatre and music during their careers. The same is true of Kjartan Ragnarsson, recipient of a lifetime achievement award at the *Gríman* theatre arts awards, who has had a long and successful career as an actor, playwright, director and theatre manager. His son Ragnar Kjartansson also received a special achievement award last week, at the Export Awards: Ragnar is one of Iceland's leading artists, spreading our creative genius around the world.

The nation's ambition probably reaches its apogee in creativity. Not only in arts, but in innovation in sciences and business. An example is seen in the company Össur, which has not only had great success in technical solutions in prosthetics – which have transformed the lives of thousands of people who have lost limbs – but also in contributions in the humanitarian and welfare field, *inter alia* by providing support to outstanding athletes at the Paralympic Games.

The feats of our small but mighty nation draw attention around the world. On my visit to Japan, one of the most highly developed nations on earth, I was surprised to find how our hosts felt that they had something to learn from Icelanders, for instance in the utilisation of geothermal energy, and in achieving

a more gender equal society. Iceland is a leader in progress towards gender equality – although we are well aware that work remains to be done. It is also essential to work for equality in a broader sense: I think, for instance, of the status of boys, and equality regardless of generation or origin. With regard to our international reputation, it is worth remembering that we can have even greater influence as part of the united Nordic nations. Together the Nordic nations comprise about the tenth biggest economy in the world. United with our Nordic cousins, we can have an impact, in this era when people are desperate for good examples that can demonstrate that the wellbeing of humans, nature and the economy can go together.

My dear fellow-Icelanders!

Childhood is a precious thing. It is a time of imagination and creation. A time when our hearts are open. It takes courage and bravery to preserve the child within us. It can only happen where trust exists.

Let us have trust, and be worthy of trust. Let us be careful with our words and deeds, and speak and act with respect. Our children read and learn what they see and hear around them. We can nurture the one who lacks courage, and be the sun for those who cannot see the light, to quote the wise words of a poem by two schoolgirls from Hofsfós in north Iceland, which they call *Knight of Love* – that has been so brilliantly sung by GDRN and is now being performed by children's choirs. We must give ourselves time to look each other in the eye, to put down our phones, and experience enjoyable times together with full presence and commitment. Let us make use of our words, listen to their cadences – let us enjoy this wonderful, unique language that is ours, and pass it on to the new Icelanders who join us here. We know that new Icelanders can gain good command of the language, as we see in the case of three friends who came top of their class at the Ármúli Comprehensive College this spring, and won awards for their achievements in Icelandic language. According to news reports, none of the three had known a word of Icelandic only three years before.

I myself intend to set a good example by taking a summer break from Facebook; and in general I intend to reduce the time I spend on social media. I hope that, as we enter the summer and then autumn, schools and families will also set themselves some reasonable limits regarding the use of these media that may addle our wits. I intend to carry on more conversations in the real world – to engage in and initiate more dialogues, in the hope that next year we may hold a National Assembly to discuss the future that awaits our children. I shall continue to smile, even though some may feel I smile too much; I shall hug those who welcome me, and work to unlock my own courage and that of others to face these challenging times with humanity, kindness and compassion.

My fellow-Icelanders. Let us enter joyfully into this summer day, so full of promise. Let us remember to nurture the child within us, and take care to give children priority in our society. Let us allow ourselves to dream, and allow ourselves to dream together. Our greatest achievements lie just around the corner.