



New Year Address
by
President of Iceland
Halla Tómasdóttir
1 January 2026

My dear fellow-Icelanders, Happy New Year!

Björn and I send our warmest greetings with sincere gratitude for the past year. Most of us have probably experienced both joy and challenges, big events and also simple moments that remind us of what truly matters to us personally as well as within our society. My thoughts are with those who suffer, may you be embraced with compassion to find strength again.

The beginning of a new year is a symbolic turning-point. We allow ourselves to take pause, to look back and ask questions: What have we learned? What do we want to preserve? And where do we wish to go from here? Humanity has always faced changes, and generally found ways to adapt, learn and grow. Perhaps today the changes are greater than we are accustomed to, and they are of various nature: economic, social, technical and political.

Changes in matters of security and defence, as well as the impact of digital technology on individuals, the economy and democracy itself, are testing the social contract and mutual trust among individuals. Few technical innovations have given rise to as much interest, hope and concern as Artificial Intelligence. AI has become an inescapable element of discussions about the future of humanity. It has evolved

fast, and now influences data-gathering, education, employment, and communications. It offers hitherto-unknown opportunities, such as the potential for an overview of a vast quantity of data that can help us find solutions more rapidly. But AI is mechanical in nature – not creative like the human mind – and it lacks a moral compass. Hence, we must use it with caution, and approach it from a critical perspective, rather than placing blind trust in it.

Many people have underlined the necessity to establish a clear ethical framework for such technology, ensure transparency, and combat disinformation. Governments must strive to prevent the abuse of AI, including the dissemination of convincing fake news, that undermine trust, both within societies and internationally. Technology must never be permitted to erode democracy or social ties – on the contrary it must strengthen human dignity, promote equality and open access to knowledge. If handled correctly, this “augmented intelligence” can become a powerful tool which supports responsible innovation and development. If used sensibly, it can pave the way for a better future for all.

Many regions of the world are now experiencing escalating conflicts, and most societies are plagued with polarisation. We Icelanders are not immune to the impacts of this uncertainty. But, precisely at times like this, it is vital to remember that our society is built on strong foundations, which have served us well. Let us strengthen them further.

On 24 October 2025, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of Iceland’s Women’s Day Off in 1975. That landmark garnered well-deserved attention from around the world. Foreign heads of state sent us warm greetings on the occasion, stating that much could be learned from the Icelandic example. At a conference I attended in Beijing, following in the footsteps of former Icelandic president Madame Vigdís Finnbogadóttir who spoke there thirty years earlier, I observed

well how Iceland's leadership in closing the gender gap inspires other nations to raise their ambitions.

Iceland's responsible utilisation of geothermal energy has also attracted international attention and set a good example for other nations. For decades the training of foreign students in the fields of geothermal energy, gender equality, fisheries and land restoration has been one of our most important contributions to international development cooperation. Our knowledge has proved its value.

Though we are a small nation, we can effectively share what we have learned and discovered. Gender equality and sustainable utilisation of natural resources are among our strengths and keys to a peaceful and liveable world.

Icelandic nature gives us much to be thankful for, but it also presents us with challenges. In 2025 we marked the thirtieth anniversary of avalanches that struck the West Fjords in 1995. Dozens of people died, both adults and children. Those communities are still overshadowed by the memory of these natural disasters. The avalanche barriers which have since been constructed there serve as a daily reminder of what happened. But this painful history is also a story of heroism, selflessness and unity, and it reminds us that, in the shadow of traumatic events, faith in our future is essential.

The people of Grindavík, and emergency professionals, are still engaged in an arduous struggle with the forces of nature, with ongoing volcanic activity. Through a massive effort it has proved possible to safeguard homes and other structures by constructing man-made barriers, which have repeatedly required reinforcement. But we must also reinforce mental health barriers during times of threats and disasters. People all over Iceland have provided practical and compassionate support to the inhabitants of Grindavík – opening up their homes, and their hearts. Unity in society is grounded in the principle that no person should have to live in fear of being unable to fulfil their essential needs, and opportunities

for a decent life. The response to traumatic events must be assistance and a healing process – for otherwise trauma may inflict deep wounds that heal only slowly, or never.

I have also been highlighting the need to raise more effective defences for children and young people, not the least against the negative impact of smart devices and social media. Never in our history have young children encountered such an overwhelming flood of external stimuli as they do at present. While social media can be beneficial, they are also a platform for unrealistic standards, and rapid dissemination of harmful content. Children possess creativity, curiosity and resilience, and it is our responsibility to provide them the conditions where those qualities may flourish. The youngsters who attended the Children's Forum last year presented me with their Phone Covenant. At the top of the list is the young people's request that we adults set a better example in our use of smart technology. This is a clear message that we should respect.

The position of vulnerable boys is another urgent issue, which must be addressed decisively and humanely. Too many boys encounter difficulties in school, and may experience social isolation, mental health challenges and various addictions. Boys appear less likely to seek help, and to receive the assistance they need. It is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that all children and youngsters, regardless of gender and background, gain opportunities, find a purpose, and attain self-esteem. The wellbeing of today's children will determine Iceland's history and resilience in the coming years and decades.

The song *Heimahöfn* (Safe Haven), that we heard just now, reminds us of the importance of belonging, of being a part of a community that you consider a safe haven. Belonging is at the heart of human happiness and wellbeing. I saw this clearly when I visited inmates at the Litla-Hraun prison during Advent. Caring volunteers provide invaluable service to people who have lost their way and need

support to find the way back to their own safe haven. It serves society best if no people are marginalised, and that we provide support for those who go astray, suffer trauma, and face difficulties.

During my time in the office of president, I have met countless people who selflessly serve on rescue teams, in women's associations, choirs, sports organisations, and all sorts of groups working for the common good. Here in Iceland, we have a strong tradition of volunteer work. Such activities not only strengthen our social fabric – they are also a safe haven for those who participate. Let us keep in mind that a robust and effective society is grounded in shared responsibility, rather than in individual victories. We are all, in one way or another, members of Iceland's rescue teams.

My dear fellow-Icelanders, my friends.

In 2026 we will mark the fortieth anniversary of the historic summit meeting between US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev at Höfði House in Reykjavík in 1986. In a white wooden house by the sea, two leaders started a conversation that changed the world. That meeting reminds us that, though we are a small nation, we can build bridges between divergent views and establish a platform for a dialogue that matters.

Let us in the years ahead build up a society that defends human dignity, promotes trust, and ensures all its people opportunities to grow and flourish. The future is not simply something that happens, it is a reality that we bring into being – together. If we yearn for peace, we must advocate for peace. If we desire justice, we must defend it. If we want to live in a society grounded in dignity and care, we ourselves must nurture those values in word and in deed – at home, in the workplace and in public discourse.

We cannot control everything that happens to us, but we can control our own response. We can make the choice to see the good, to encourage each other, and to build upon our strengths as a nation. Our history tells us that in perilous times we Icelanders stand together as one, and in such times, it is compassion, courage and faith in the future that matters most.

May the coming year be a year of unity, courage and compassion. May each and every one of us find our own safe haven. And may peace reign in our hearts and among the nations of the world.