



Opening Speech
by
the President of Iceland
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson
at the Opening Session of
the IFSW European Conference 2017:
‘Marginalization and Social Work in a Changing Society’

29 May 2017

Minister of Social Affairs and Equality,
Presidents of the IFSW and IFSW Europe,
dear conference guests.

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to Iceland and to this first IFSW conference to be held in our country.

As President I have had many opportunities to learn about different kinds of social work done in Iceland. More than I expected, my new job has educated me about people who need the assistance and expertise which you provide. Much to my pleasure, I have also learned about the variety of organizations that provide, largely on a voluntary basis, assistance to those who need it.

You know better than I that professional social workers face daunting tasks in their daily work. Presumably, they will not become easier in years ahead. I read on the conference webpage that here in Iceland, you are going to discuss how social work is evolving with new groups being marginalized in Europe in the changing society of the twenty-first century and how social workers can promote sustainable communities. Other indicative themes are human rights, families, prevention and early intervention, health, mental health care, social work and the educational system, social work without borders, immigrants, challenges in social work with people with disabilities, substance misuse,

homeless people, social work with elderly people and disaster social work.

Dear friends, I wish you the best of luck in your engagement with these worthy themes. And welcome to Reykjavík, welcome to Iceland. We have our challenges here, we have our problems to tackle, injustice, inequality, and mistreatment. Still, we Icelanders live in a developed welfare state. We value and stress human rights; gender equality, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom to love. We cherish the freedom of individuals to act as they choose as long as they do not hurt others, or impinge on other persons' freedom.

We like to think that we can be proud of many things in our society. But there is always work ahead, always room for improvement. One of my favourite poets is the late Tómas Guðmundsson, often known as the bard of Reykjavík. To conclude, let me cite the finishing lines in one of his poems. We can use these words as a call for arms to social workers and everyone who wants to improve the world. I will first cite the original Icelandic and then offer you my own translation:

Því meðan til er böll sem bætt þú gast,
og barist var á meðan hjá þú sast,
er ólán heimsins einnig þér að kenna.

In English:

For as long as there was harm which you could have eased,
and there was battle but you stood aside,
the troubles of this world are also your fault.