



**Declaration
by President of Iceland
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson
on the occasion of
an international commemoration ceremony
in Poland
1 September 2019,
80 years after the beginning of World War II**

The Second World War will always be counted among the most appalling occurrences in human history. It is important, and a matter of course, to commemorate now the beginning of that conflict, on 1 September 1939.

The Nazi invasion of Poland marked the outbreak of war, but it was preceded by a prolonged series of contributory events; and the horrors that lay ahead were hideous beyond words. It is appropriate to gather together in Poland, precisely 80 years after the terror began there. The Polish people were among those who suffered most in the war. We must not forget the crimes that were committed, the brutality that reigned, or the torment inflicted on millions. We must never forget the Holocaust of the Jews, nor other extermination campaigns carried out by the Nazis and their henchmen.

There is nothing new about bellicose factions exploiting fear and malice, mistrust and hostility. They corrupt true patriotism and pervert feelings of national pride into chauvinism and xenophobia. We have seen many such examples, and they have lessons to teach us, which we should bear in mind, now and always.

May this memorial ceremony serve to promote solidarity and sympathy within our societies, and among the nations of the world. Peace and welfare are founded on diversity and freedom, tolerance and open minds.

Past history can never be told once and for all. But no-one may be permitted to deny crimes against humanity. And no-one may monopolise narratives of the past or throw a veil over them – neither governments nor political factions. Robust nations and states are strong enough to tolerate critical perspectives on their history, discussion of debatable aspects of the past and their own dark mistakes.

On behalf of my wife Eliza and myself, I thank the people of Poland for their hospitality and goodwill. By the same token I express warm regards to the Poles who have come to Iceland and made their contribution to our society, and I wish them all good fortune.