

Ms. Áslaug Eir Hólmgeirsdóttir, Director General of the Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries

Ms. Nína Björk Jónsdóttir, Director of GRÓ International Centre for Capacity Development, Sustainable use of Natural Resources and Societal Change under the auspices of UNESCO.

Mr. Þorsteinn Sigurðsson, Director of Marine and Freshwater Research Institute,

Ms. Julie Ingham and the whole GRÓ FTP Team,

Specialist Line Heads Margeir Gissurarson (Quality Management), Jónas P. Jónasson (Aquatic Resources Assessment and Management), David Benhaïm (Sustainable Aquaculture) and Hreiðar Þór Valtýsson (Fisheries Policies and Management),

All distinguished guest seated here with us,

And all the fellows

Good afternoon,

It is an honor for me to speak on behalf of the fellows of this cohort of the GRÓ Fisheries Training Programme.

Firstly, I want to express our gratitude to the GRÓ Fisheries Training Programme team and its partners for offering us this opportunity. We appreciate the extensive network of partners that the program has, which has allowed us to benefit from various expertise and industry players. From meeting the very respected Tumi to the unassuming Steingrímur who we learnt the other day that he was the man who planted the Olympic Torch at the North Pole! To all who took us through different lectures and trainings over the past six months, receive our gratitude. We have been privileged to receive intensive applied training in our respective specialization lines (namely Aquatic Resources Assessment and Management, Quality Management, Sustainable Aquaculture, and Fisheries Policies and Management), and we have learned so much about the sustainable use and management of living aquatic resources. We have worked with specialists who have shared their knowledge and experiences with us, and we have developed project reports which are displayed outside this hall that will be useful in our work back in our home countries. We appreciate the efforts that everyone here has put in to ensure that we deliver quality study reports.

During our stay in Iceland, we have learned a lot about Icelandic culture and ways of life. We visited some popular tourist destinations in the country, which have allowed us to experience Iceland's breath-taking landscapes and unique natural beauty. From towering mountains and cascading waterfalls to vast glaciers and geothermal hot springs, we were able to visit some popular tourist destinations and experience this beauty firsthand. We were able to learn about Icelanders' unique traditions and ways of life. For example, we learned about the importance of fishing in

Icelandic society, as well as the significance of Icelandic folklore and mythology. We appreciate the warm hospitality that we have received from the Icelandic people, and we will carry these memories with us for a long time.

Beyond the technical knowledge and cultural exposure, what has made this program truly special is the people. We have formed bonds with our fellow participants from fifteen countries spread throughout the globe from Asia through Africa, the Carribeans to Central America. Throughout this program, we have been reminded time and time again of the importance of cooperation, capacity building, knowledge-sharing, and research in achieving sustainable development. We have seen how different approaches to fisheries management can work in practice, and we have been inspired to take these lessons home with us and apply them in our own contexts.

Our stay wasn't without hiccups. Traveling to a foreign country can be an exciting and enriching experience, but it's important to have a support system in place to deal with any unexpected challenges that may arise. It's clear that the Program and the fellows were able to provide that support and make our stay in Iceland as comfortable and enjoyable as possible, despite the hiccups along the way. For example, one of us lost their beloved mother. The Program and the fellows stood with him in a very supportive way, and we appreciate that. We had a few minor accidents, a bout of flu here or there, a fellow losing track of their movements in the city. But the program made sure that we were all safe and always attended to.

In conclusion, I want to express our sincere gratitude to everyone who has made this program possible, from the organizers to the trainers to the Icelandic people who have welcomed us with open arms. In a very special way, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the GRÓ International Centre for Capacity Development, Sustainable use of Natural Resources and Societal Change for the invaluable support and opportunities provided to all the fellows seated here today and countless other professionals around the world. Through GRÓ promoting sustainable development through capacity building, knowledge sharing, and research in various fields, we had the invaluable experience of learning a different way to exploit resources for economic gain and posterity. GRÓ's dedication to excellence and commitment to fostering cooperation and collaboration among nations from all over the world is truly admirable. On behalf of all the fellows, we are honoured to have been a part of their programs and initiatives and will carry the lessons and experiences gained with us throughout our careers. Thank you, GRÓ, for all that you do.

As we come to the end of this program, we feel more empowered than ever to make a difference in our communities and to contribute to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. We are grateful for the support and encouragement we have received along the way, and we hope to stay connected with our fellow participants and trainers as we move forward in our careers. As we leave this beautiful country, I want to leave you with this quote from Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, the emperor of Rome. "Never let the future disturb you. If you have to, you will meet it with the same weapons of reason which today arm you against the present." The 2022/23 Cohort of Fellows!

Thank you everyone.