

UNU-GTP – Opening Ceremony 2019

Opening speech for the 41st annual session of UNU Geothermal Training Programme

Ladies and gentlemen - Dear UNU Fellows

My name is Lúdvík S. Georgsson and I am the director of United Nations University Geothermal Training Programme or UNU-GTP, as we usually shorten it. I want to start by wishing all of you welcome to this Opening Ceremony of the 41st annual session of UNU-GTP. You, the UNU Fellows, have travelled a long way to be here today – to this island of volcanoes and ice where geothermal is actually a way of life – expecting to learn new things about different aspects of geothermal exploration and utilization. I am sure that at the end of the 6-month training in October you will have gained knowledge and experience that will be of benefit to your institutions at home, to your professional careers and even for your future personal lives.

This year we expect to have 25 UNU Fellows from 15 countries for the 6-month training, which is a similar size of class to the ones we have had in most of recent years. In the group, there will be representatives from China, Djibouti, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Montserrat, Nigeria, Philippines, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Tanzania. As you can see by the smaller number attending here today, we have not managed to clear the residence permits for all the UNU Fellows in time for this opening day, but 15 were expected to be here today having arrived during the weekend. But only 12 have arrived. Due to strikes of pilots and other problems during travel, 3 are arriving later today. The remaining 10 should be arriving during the next 2 weeks or so. There are varying reasons behind this, which I will not be going into here. We are though optimistic that this will not affect the training very much. If all the group completes the 6-month training – which is very much the norm – the UNU-GTP family will have grown to 719 by next October. That is quite a large group. The UNU Fellows have come from 63 different countries in all 6 inhabited continents. Two of them are new for this year, *Nigeria*, the most populous country in Africa, with the first UNU Fellow from W-Africa. On the other hand, is the smallest country with regard to population with which we have cooperated, *Montserrat* in the Caribbean, which according to its 2019 census has only 5215 people. We are also particularly happy with the number of women in the group, their share has been increasing fast in the last few years. This year, there are 11 women in the class or 44% of the group, which is certainly the best ratio we have had - from the time of the starting group, where 1 woman in a group of 2 calculated as 50%, but that is not comparable.

We also have among us a few former UNU 6-month Fellows. Some are pursuing an MSc degree at either of the two leading universities in Iceland under Fellowships from UNU-GTP. Five of the current 10 MSc Fellows are scheduled to defend their theses in geothermal science or engineering during the next 2 months or so, and actually, one of them already did so just before the Easter holidays, while 5 new MSc Fellows are expected to join us in late summer.

Currently, four former UNU 6-month Fellows are also working towards their PhD degrees at the University of Iceland and Reykjavík University. They are Charles Lichoro from Kenya, who is expected to defend his PhD in the late summer, Zheng Tingting from China, Geoffrey Mibei from Kenya and Xavier Musonye, also from Kenya. In addition, a new PhD Fellow from Tanzania is scheduled to embark on this 3-4 years' journey in late summer.

During the last few years, we have usually offered 5 new MSc Fellowships and 1 new PhD Fellowship per year. To date, 63 of our former 6-month Fellows have graduated with an MSc degree in Iceland and 2 have completed their PhD studies. I encourage you to talk to these Fellows as their words of wisdom regarding the studies and life in Iceland in general, can be quite valuable for you. Perhaps some of you will walk in their footsteps in the not-too-distant future.

The United Nations University Geothermal Training Programme has a long history, having operated continuously since 1979 – and you are now becoming part of that story. While the basic structure of the 6-month training has remained similar through the years, the overall programme has grown considerably. For the first two decades, the activities of UNU-GTP were limited to the 6-month training, but since the turn of the century, new activities have been added. The first UNU-GTP MSc Fellowship was awarded in 2000, and in 2008 we awarded the first PhD Fellowships, thus giving former 6-month Fellows the possibility to return to Iceland for an academic degree. In 2005, the first training event was given abroad. It was in support of the UN Millennium Development Goals, thus moving part of the training activities outside the borders of Iceland to developing countries. The annual UN Millennium, and their later successors, the SDG Short Course Series, are now an important part of our operations. Since 2005, the short courses and other training activities abroad have diversified and increased in number, with a large number given in recent years, especially in the years 2011-2016, and sponsored by various entities. In addition, UNU-GTP has been involved in various international cooperation projects, with the latest example being the Geothermal Diploma Course offered in Spanish with a duration of 5 months in El Salvador in cooperation with LaGeo S.A. de C.V. and the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs. But – I emphasize that we still regard the 6-month training in Iceland the very core of the programme.

The operations of UNU-GTP are mostly financed by the Government of Iceland as a part of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) of the country. We are of course grateful for the support, which the UNU Geothermal Training Programme has received from the Government of Iceland through the years. In 2019, we expect this to amount to just over 2 M USD.

During your 6 months in Iceland I expect you to learn a whole lot about geothermal. For the first 6 weeks, everyone will follow the same curriculum in the general studies, learning a little bit about most aspects of geothermal exploration and development. During this period, you will also work on a group project where cooperation is the key to realize a common goal – as is very much case in the real world's geothermal projects. These first 6 weeks are also the period during which you are becoming acquainted with your new environment in Iceland. The specialized training will then start on June 11, after the holidays of Whit Sunday. During that phase as well as during the project period, which starts on August 6, you will receive training specific to your particular line of study. Through it all, we will have field trips and excursions to geothermal fields, industries, energy companies and power plants around Iceland, which I am sure you will enjoy. Even though we have high expectations of you regarding the training and studies, you should also remember to enjoy your time in Iceland.

We can say that Iceland will be your home away from home for the next 6 months. You should become well acquainted with Iceland, both the country and the culture over the course of the next weeks and months. I hope that you will have many good memories to bring back home with you in October, as well new ties of friendship that extend around the globe.

Before I end, I want to mention that this will be the last year that the Geothermal Training Programme will be operating as a part of the United Nations University. So in that respect you are in a special position. The Government of Iceland has decided to cut the ties with UNU, from the start of 2020, due to policy changes at UNU, which are believed to be unsuitable for the four Icelandic UNU programmes. Hopefully, we will continue operating under the UN banner through another UN institution, which we should receive information on in the next few months. But if not, it may also be as an independent Icelandic organization with full support from the Government of Iceland. So in essence I expect there will not be much change in the activities.

Now I would like to invite **Mr. Jónas Ketilsson** to address you. He represents Orkustofnun – the National Energy Authority, our host organization, and is deputizing for its Director General, **Dr. Gudni A. Jóhannesson**, who is on vacation. Please Jónas.

Before we finish this official opening ceremony, I would like to introduce you to the staff of UNU-GTP:

Ingimar G. Haraldsson, is the Deputy Director of UNU-GTP. He became a staff member in 2010 and Deputy Director in 2014. He is a civil and environmental engineer by education and responsible for the running of short courses and other training activities abroad, as well as overseeing the UNU-GTP computer facilities and taking part in the general running of the programme, including the management of some international cooperation projects. He has probably met the majority of you before – if not in person then through Skype – interviewing you for the training.

Thórhildur Ísberg is the School Manager. She has an MA degree in social sciences and international relations, but is actually also in the process of completing a BSc degree in Forestry. She is responsible for various administrative tasks, including the processing of applications, handling of visa issues, accommodation, medical issues, and per diem payments to Fellows. She is also responsible for various financial issues pertaining to the UNU-GTP. All of you are no doubt already well acquainted with Thórhildur through the application and visa process.

Málfríður Ómarsdóttir – Frída – Environmental Scientist and Editor. She has an MSc degree in Environmental Sciences and Natural Resources. Frída is responsible for the online-learning system, publications, excursions, reporting to the UNU headquarters in Tokyo, and various general matters. Those of you who have not already met her will find that she is an easy person to get along with, and you can approach her with any concerns or personal issues that may come up during your stay in Iceland.

Markús A.G. Wilde, is our Service Manager. He has an MA degree in history and is responsible for various organizational procedures and general service with regards to the studies. You will find Markús a very useful source of information on many aspects related to the studies and on life in Iceland in general.

Finally, **myself**, I have been associated with the programme from the very start in 1979 and then full time as Deputy Director from 1990 until 2013, when I succeeded the founding Director, Dr. Ingvar B. Fridleifsson. I am a physical engineer by education, but my professional career was in geophysical exploration of geothermal resources, for the Geothermal Department of Orkustofnun – the predecessor of ÍSOR – Iceland GeoSurvey – for approximately 15 years before joining UNU-GTP full time.

I hope that you will find the UNU-GTP team helpful and capable in its tasks, and that we will succeed in making your life and studies here in Iceland pleasant. And remember that in a way, we are your new family who will all try as possible to make life in Iceland easy for you.

Finally, I would like to ask the new UNU Fellows to introduce themselves. We will do it in alphabetical order of countries. For general information, lying on the table at the wall is a sheet with the names, countries and study lines of the UNU Fellows of 2019.

With this I declare the 41st session of the UNU-Geothermal Training Programme opened.
