

Ávarp við útskrift úr jarðhitaskóla háskóla sameinuðu þjóðanna,

13. október 2017

Dear fellows of the United Nations University Geothermal Training Programme, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the Minister for tourism, industry and innovation, it is an honour for me to address you today on this 39th graduation ceremony of the UNU Geothermal Training Programme. The Minister could not attend this ceremony, as she is busy preparing for the upcoming parliamentary elections, but she asked me to send her best regards and good wishes to you all.

The Geothermal Training Programme of the United Nations University is, as you know, a postgraduate training programme, aiming at assisting developing countries in capacity building within geothermal exploration and development. The programme consists of six months annual training for practicing professionals from developing and transitional countries with significant geothermal potential. Priority is given to countries where geothermal development is under way, in order to maximize technology transfer. The programme has operated in Iceland since 1979 and is a co-operation between the United Nations University and the Government of Iceland, and is hosted by the National Energy Authority.

Today we are graduating 23 students from 10 countries (Djibouti, El Salvador, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, China, Malawi, Tanzania and Vietnam). After this graduation ceremony today, you will be among the 670 fellows from 60 countries who have finished the six months training programme here in Iceland. My colleague from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs once referred to this group as our Geothermal Ambassadors. I think that is a good description and we in Iceland are very proud of the 670 Geothermal Ambassadors we have graduated since 1979. In the last six months you have gathered valuable knowledge and expertise in the field of geothermal utilisation, and hopefully you will be able to use that knowledge in the various work which you will undertake in the future.

Time can be measured in many different ways. If we think of our lifetime, six months might not been seen as a long time, but six months away from family and friends, in a strange and different country, is a long time. I think that it shows courage and determination of you to come to Iceland and to live and work here for six months. It is therefore worth celebrating your achievements here today.

We live in exciting times when it comes to energy related matters. Renewable energy resources are not distributed evenly around the world. Here in Iceland we are so fortunate to have plenty of renewable energy resources, mainly hydropower and geothermal energy, which we use for our advantages in our daily life. As you know all of our electricity generation is from hydropower or geothermal energy. And over 90% of all houses in Iceland are heated with geothermal, and the remaining 10% heated with renewable electricity. But there is more to geothermal energy than electricity production, house heating and swimming pools. Innovation brings us new ideas that are being developed to create more value from this valuable resource under our feet. This includes new technology for traditional usage, such as drying fish products for export and farming of tropical fish species, to more novel products

such as cosmetics from the minerals in the geothermal brine and production of synthetic fuels from the gasses associated with the geothermal steam. The possibilities in terms of geothermal utilization seem endless.

Today the world is at a crossroad when it comes to energy and climate issues. We in Iceland are convinced that utilization of geothermal energy should become one of the leading methods of reducing greenhouse gas effects and by further developing the technologies of harnessing the heat inside our planet many countries will play an important role in reducing the use of fossil fuels. And of course that means that you, the geothermal experts, will have to be on board and have an important role to play. We need combined international effort to spread the word of possibilities related to geothermal utilisation.

For us Icelanders renewable energy is geothermal and hydropower, but when we speak to our colleagues at international meetings, the concept for them is more “wind, solar and biomass”, and sometimes hydropower, but very seldom do they mention geothermal. This is something we want to change and bring more awareness of geothermal energy, in a global context. The UNU Geothermal Training Programme is very important in this regard, and something we take pride in as I have already mentioned.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is one additional thing my minister wanted to share with you today. That relates to the fact that the energy sector, world wide, has previously been dominated by men to a large extent. We in Iceland strongly feel that it is important that we get more women into this sector and I think we are slowly getting there. This year the share of women in the group of graduates from the UNU-GTP is 35%. Which is rather good but we can do even better. I know that those who have been leading the UNU Geothermal Training Programme have been aware of the importance to invite more women into the geothermal sector, and we encourage you to continue on that path.

In April next year, the Iceland Geothermal Congress 2018 will be held here in Reykjavik. Hopefully some of you will have the opportunity to come and visit again next spring and participate in the conference. Furthermore, in 2020 Iceland will host the World Geothermal Congress. This will be a great event, as this is the Olympics of Geothermal. It has already been suggested that this event would be a great opportunity for all the former fellows of the UNU Geothermal Training Programme to visit Reykjavik and have some kind of a Reunion. Hopefully, we will see you there.

Dear Fellows. On behalf of the Government of Iceland I sincerely congratulate you with your achievements and I welcome you to our group of Geothermal Ambassadors. You are now part of an important network of geothermal experts. I hope that you have enjoyed your time here in Iceland and we wish you and your families all the best in the future.

Thank you.