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UNU-GTP – Opening Ceremony 2018

Opening speech given at the Opening Ceremony of the 40th annual session of the UNU Geothermal Training Programme

Ladies and gentlemen - Dear UNU Fellows

My name is Lúdvík S. Georgsson, director of UNU-GTP. I want to start by wishing you welcome to this Opening Ceremony of the 40th annual session of the United Nations University Geothermal Training Programme. You have travelled a long way to be here today – to this island of volcanoes and ice where geothermal is a way of life – 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 valuable 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 24 UNU Fellows from 14 countries for the 6-month training, which is a slightly smaller class than we have had in most of recent years. The plan was to have 25, but yesterday one candidate had to cancel his participation in relation to health reasons. In the class, there will be representatives from Bolivia, China, Djibouti, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Nevis, Philippines, St. Lucia, Tanzania, and Zambia. As you can see by the smaller number attending here, we have had some difficulties this year in having the residence permits for you ready in time. There are several reasons behind this, which I will not be going into here. However, the last few days have seen a good improvement in this, which means that we should see most of the group in Iceland during next week or so, while the last ones are expected to join us in the first days of May. We are sorry for this but are optimistic that it 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 reached 694 by next October. That is a sizable group, coming from 61 different countries in all 6 inhabited continents, bonded by their shared interest in geothermal and of course the shared experience of having completed the UNU 6-month training programme at some point in their lives. We are particularly happy that the number of women in the group has been increasing in the last few years. This year, there are 9 women in the class or 38%, which is similar to the average female attendance during the 2000s, which can be compared to the 22% average from the start. We are aiming at improving this even further, with the ultimate goal being complete gender balance, of course.

We also have among us several former UNU 6-month Fellows, who are now pursuing MSc degrees at either of the two leading universities in Iceland under UNU-GTP Fellowships. Here, the 6-month training can fulfil 25% of the MSc programme requirements of these universities, if needed. Five out of the current 10 MSc Fellows are scheduled to defend their theses in geothermal science or engineering during the next 2 months or so, while 5 new (MSc) Fellows are expected to join us in late summer.

Currently, three former 6-month Fellows are also working towards their PhD degrees at the University of Iceland, Charles Lichoro from Kenya, Zheng Tingting from China and Geoffrey Mibei from Kenya. In addition, a new PhD Fellow, Xavier Musonye from Kenya, is scheduled to embark on this 3-year journey in late summer. He will be the first to do his PhD on a UNU-GTP Fellowship at Reykjavik University.

In the last few years, we have usually offered 5 new MSc Fellowships and 1 new PhD Fellowship per year. To date, 57 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, as it has been 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 evolved and grown considerably. For the first two decades UNU-GTP was only about the 6-month training, but since the turn of the century, the activities of UNU-GTP have evolved considerably. The first MSc UNU-GTP fellowships were awarded in 2000, and in 2008 we awarded the first PhD UNU-GTP Fellowships, thus giving the 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 the developing countries. The annual UN Millennium and later SDGs 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, the latest example of which is the offering of a Geothermal Diploma Course with a duration of 5 months in El Salvador in cooperation with LaGeo S.A. de C.V., the University of El Salvador, the Nordic Development Fund – NDF and the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs. But – we still regard the 6-month training as 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.

During your 6 months in Iceland you will get to know a whole lot about geothermal. For the first 6 weeks, everyone will go through the same curriculum in the general studies, learning a little bit about most aspects of geothermal development. During this time, you will also have a group project where cooperation is the key to realize a common goal – as is the case in 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 May 29. During that phase and the last phase, the project period, which will start on July 23, you will receive training specific to your particular line of study. Through it all, we will have field trips and excursions to geothermal fields and power plants around Iceland, which I am sure you will enjoy. Even though we have high expectations of you regarding the studies, it is still important to remember that you should also enjoy yourself while you are here, and we hope that your experience in Iceland will be something you remember and treasure in the future.

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

Two events should make this year quite special. Next week, on April 26th, UNU-GTP will be celebrating its 40th Anniversary, through sessions at the Icelandic Geothermal Conference – IGC 2018, held in Harpan, Reykjavík, on April 24-26. There, presentations on the activities of the UNU-GTP will be given by staff members of the UNU-GTP. Five foreign honorary guests and former UNU fellows will give presentations on the effect that UNU-GTP has had on geothermal evolution in their home countries. Finally, our PhD and MSc Fellows will present the research projects they are working on in Iceland. We are certainly looking forward to our anniversary. The other event is even more special, Iceland's first ever participation in the World Cup finals in football this summer in Russia, as the smallest nation ever to qualify for such major football finals. I can tell you there is tremendous excitement in Iceland for this event, and I can promise you that you will be aware of that and enjoy it. Unusual is the fact that none of your 14 countries will be presented in Russia, so it should be easy for you to select a new “favourite” to cheer on.

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 we are your new family who will try all as possible to make life in Iceland easy for you.

With this, I declare this 40th session of the UNU-Geothermal Training Programme opened.
