

**Graduation Ceremony of the UNU Fisheries Training Programme  
March 12, 2009**

**Address of Mr. Hermann Ingólfsson, Director General for  
International Development, on behalf of the Minister for Foreign  
Affairs Mr. Össur Skarphéðinsson**

Ladies and gentlemen, dear fellows.

It gives me great pleasure to address you here today at this graduation ceremony on behalf of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Össur Skarphéðinsson.

I would like to begin by congratulating all of you for your hard work and personal achievement. During the past few months you have worked with dedication and commitment to enhance your knowledge in your areas of expertise. This is a day of celebration, but also a moment for reflection and remembrance. A good colleague and friend in your group - Li Ge - died tragically earlier this year. I know that this incident has had a difficult impact on all of you and today our thoughts and prayers are with her family and friends.

Dear fellows.

The Fisheries Training Programme is now graduating fellows for the eleventh time. These eleven years have been successful and productive: 187 fellows from 35 countries have graduated and as the work of the Programme has expanded, somewhere between three and four hundred additional experts have benefited from training courses organized by the Programme in developing countries. I want to use this opportunity to pay tribute to the excellent work done by Þór and his staff and acknowledge the crucial support from the Marine Research Institute, as well as the important engagement by the University of Akureyri, the University of Iceland, Hólar University College, Matís and other institutions, companies and individuals.

A financial crisis is shaking the world economy. We are all affected by this turmoil and Iceland was one of the first countries to be badly hit. The global impact could be serious.

The World Bank estimates that poverty will increase substantially – this year, about 50 million people in developing countries will fall below the poverty line as a direct result of the crisis. Faced with these challenges, we have an important job to do.

For almost four decades Iceland has contributed to international efforts to fight global poverty. A guiding principle has always been to provide assistance in areas where we have particular expertise and knowledge to offer. In this context, our cooperation with the United Nations University in the areas of fisheries and geothermal energy were natural steps. Indeed, the two training programmes are key components in Iceland's overall policy for development cooperation. This is demonstrated by the fact that they represent the second and third largest items in the 2009 budget for multilateral cooperation. We are now in the process of initiating the establishment of a UNU Land Restoration Training Programme and a pilot project for a gender equality programme is underway.

During the last five years Icelandic official development assistance has increased significantly. A share of this increase has been used to develop further and expand the work of the UNU training programmes. The Government remains fully committed to international development efforts and our objective is to become one of the countries that allocate most to development assistance as a share of Gross National Income. We are, however, realistic that this objective will be reached later than we had hoped for and in the current circumstances it will be a challenge to maintain unchanged level of activity.

Dear fellows.

An important lesson learned during the financial crisis is probably that the only investment that guarantees safe return is education. Your knowledge and experience is now more valuable than ever before. Science is a key to development. I am confident that the knowledge you have acquired during your months in Iceland will help your countries make fisheries even more important in your economies – it generates income, increases employment opportunities and improves food security.

In closing, allow me again to congratulate you on your graduation. I wish you a safe journey back home and hope that you look back on your stay here as a time of both

professional and personal enjoyment. We encourage you to stay in touch with your new friends, in Iceland as well as in other regions of the World. I wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

Thank you.