

**UNU Geothermal Training Programme
Graduation Ceremony
October 22, 2010**

**Address by
H.E. Mr. Össur Skarphéðinsson
Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade**

Dear UNU fellows, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

It gives me great pleasure to join you here for the graduation of a group from the UNU Geothermal Training Programme. This is the second time that I have the honour to address a graduation ceremony. The first time – in 2007 – I was the minister of industry and today I participate as the minister for foreign affairs.

As you may know, my enthusiasm for the geothermal training programme knows few boundaries. I have followed the programme from its inception and my affection for your work goes beyond my professional responsibilities. In my view you are blessed to work in a field of specialization that offers magnificent prospects. As a scientist myself – in the “next-door-discipline” of marine sciences – I find the opportunity that you are given extremely exciting; to be able to use scientific and technological know-how to improve the lives of millions of people, by harvesting, yet preserving, the nature.

I want to congratulate all the fellows for completing the six months training course and for your achievements during your stay here in Iceland. You may sometimes have wondered how you ended up in this place. On top of the world, on a hot lava rock with spewing volcanoes. Today, I sincerely hope that you look at your time here with pride and satisfaction.

I also would like to thank the staff and teachers of the programme for your commitment and dedication. Last but not least I want to pay special tribute to Ingvar Birgir Friðleifsson, for his leadership and for devoting his professional life to building up and developing the programme.

Graduation from the geothermal training programme is now taking place for the 32nd time. Since 1979 the programme has graduated 424 fellows. Today, 28 fellows join this group, taking the total number to 452. It is particularly welcome that even during these challenging economic times, this year we see the largest number ever graduate from the programme.

Furthermore, I am very pleased to see a growing number of women work in this field; One-third of today's graduates are women, compared to the average of 20% in the programme's history. The gender perspective is central to Iceland's foreign policy, based on the firm belief that gender equality and empowerment is fundamental to a more peaceful and prosperous world. In fact, we are working on a pilot project to develop a gender equality training programme in cooperation with the University of Iceland, an aim to have it included in the UNU family.

I also want to mention the additional components of the training programme, namely the masters and doctoral programme and the short courses and workshops organized in selected countries. In my view it was sensible to expand the programme in this direction, to give people the opportunity to deepen their expertise, and more importantly to seek ways to reach out to a larger number of people with practical training. I am confident that the outreach will grow even stronger in the coming months and years, when we further explore training activities in Central America and East Africa in collaboration with partners such as the Nordic Development Fund and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Moreover, we have expectations that the newly established International Renewable Agency, IRENA, will prove to be an effective agent. Iceland will continue to actively promote the use of geothermal energy within that forum.

Dear friends.

As a foreign minister, allow me to underline that the geothermal training programme has a particular role to play in Iceland's foreign policy. Iceland's aim is to be an active and responsible member of the world community, and for a small country, the guiding principle is to contribute in areas where we have specific expertise and knowledge.

Geothermal power generation features prominently in such considerations and the training programme has been an important component of our international development cooperation since established in 1978 – more than 30 years ago.

Iceland's cooperation with the United Nations University has been a successful and productive partnership. We are very proud that earlier this year we finalized the agreement with the UNU on a third programme located in Iceland, the Land Restoration Training Programme. The LRT graduated its first group of fellows as a UNU programme two weeks ago, and I want to use this occasion to congratulate them as well.

Together with the fisheries training programme, the three UNU programmes constitute a key pillar in Iceland's development cooperation. All three are financed out of the Foreign Ministry's budget for development cooperation, representing more than 10% of Iceland's overall international cooperation.

Dear fellows.

The people of the world are one global community. A volcanic eruption in Iceland can have a devastating impact on the flower industry in East Africa. A disease that originates in a far away corner of the world, can within days or even hours spread to our neighbourhood. And the economic turmoil which originated from America and Europe has seriously affected economies in developing countries that had no stake in reckless banking.

In this globalized world, both global and local solutions are needed. And we all have a role to play. You, with your valuable know-how, are the special envoys of new and fascinating opportunities. Harnessing geothermal energy offers us a way to make our own communities more prosperous while at the same time mitigating climate change. It is indeed a win-win approach.

True, there are obstacles along the way, in particular the lack of financial resources that can carry the upfront risk of geothermal exploration. In my job as minister for foreign affairs I have made a special effort to encourage international agencies, financial institutions and other countries to resolve the challenge of financing. The technical expertise and know-how is here – in this room – and the capital is out there. We must find it and utilize it!

I want to conclude by congratulating you again on your graduation. I am convinced that what you have learned during your time in Iceland will give you new possibilities that can benefit you and your countries. I wish you a safe journey back home and hope you will remain “Ambassadors of Iceland” in your future endeavours.

Thank you.