



**Speech by
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson
President of Iceland
at the Doctoral Conferment Ceremony
of the University of Oulu**

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Esteemed rector,
dear friends here in Oulu,
dear young doctors.

First, I thank the representative of the young doctors for his warm wishes and wise words. This I can safely say on behalf of the seventeen of us who have today received the title of honorary doctor at this prestigious and progressive university. Furthermore, we all congratulate you on your achievement, on this milestone in your journey of study, understanding and personal growth.

I think we all know what you have been through. As for myself, I remember from my doctoral studies that we who were together in that proverbial boat promised never to ask each other these two questions: How is the writing going? And when do you plan to submit?

Dear doctors. Again, congratulations. You have shown yourselves and the rest of us what you can achieve when you put your effort and energy into that which is close to your heart and mind. I guess it must have been hard, at least at times. Actually, it should be hard but hopefully pleasurable as well along the way.

So, thank you for having stuck with it, for having shown determination, resilience, and commitment. From now on, your success will not only enhance you as individuals, but you can also contribute to society. Yes, you should be proud. You can be of help to others. You have become experts.

Or is that not such a good thing? In recent years, we have witnessed an increased suspicion or distrust towards science and fact-finding through academic methods – a distrust towards expertise, even a desire to create a divide between the so-called experts in their haughtiness on one side and common people with common sense on the other.

Do experts have all the answers? Should we always trust the experts? No, of course not. Curiosity, criticism and questioning are the essence of all research – and at the same time the essence of true expertise. Our power of conviction must stem from discovery, dialogue and debate, not from the degree itself or the position we may hold in academia or outside its walls. And, therefore, modesty must accompany our pride in and possession of expertise. We do not have all the answers. Still, we have studied the ways to seek them, and we stand on the shoulders of those who did so before us. We who have made the journey can at least say that we know the road.

Dear friends! I am both humbled and flattered to accept the honour that I have received here. I come from a small country, a fellow member in the Nordic family of nations and peoples. I consider this generous deed as a small but significant confirmation of the strong bond that exists between Iceland and Finland.

Today is a celebration of wisdom and knowledge, of humanity and decency – and yes, of expertise and pride and modesty. Allow me to conclude by quoting the motto of the University of Iceland, my old workplace to which I will soon return. It is from an ode by Jónas Hallgrímsson, arguably Iceland's most beloved poet (first in Icelandic and then English): *Vísindin efla alla dáð / orkuna styrkja, viljann hvessa / vonina glæða, hugann hressa / farsældum vefja lýð og láð. Progress depends on truth and lore / Patient research, pursued with rigor / restores a people's stagnant vigor / bringing them boons unknown before.*