



**Address
by President of Iceland
Halla Tómasdóttir
at Reykjavík Pride**

10 August 2024

Dear queer people,
family, friends, and
everyone gathered here today.

I am moved that one of my first tasks as president is to address you, who are standing here – together – for human rights.

I am filled with pride to be able to be part of this festival, and to enjoy the honour of possibly playing a tiny part in queer people's campaign for their rights here in Iceland. The history of gay rights is an important and remarkable one. For all of us – to learn from.

We are aware of the truth that the struggle for human rights is often stained with blood. And let us not look away, or pretend that queer people here in Iceland have not faced adversity.

The story of this campaign for rights is a story of conflicts. Yet by framing it within a context of joy and pride – not least the Pride March itself – you have achieved great things, dear friends. In my mind, you are the living embodiment of courage!

I am not aware of any other case of such huge progress in the field of human rights in such a short time. Yet to young people those victories may seem to be a matter of course.

In truth, however, this wonderful moment – here and now – would not be a reality for us – all of us – without the courage and unflagging efforts of innumerable individuals. Efforts that are far from over.

But we stand here together today in order to make the clear point that we intend to defend the right of every one of us to be exactly who we are.

And we will never retreat. Never.

Back to pride, which is at the heart of Pride Week. I rarely feel more pride in our nation than when I am abroad and I tell the story of our queer community: that extraordinary journey which was undertaken in face of persistent resistance.

I permit myself to believe that the vast majority of Icelanders have felt in their hearts the injustice entailed in past discrimination – and reject the discrimination which still takes place today.

The achievement we are celebrating here today lies partly in having imbued the campaign for rights with the beauty in life itself – with joy and diversity. You have permitted us to step into your world, and thus we stand united against injustice.

For it is human nature to wish to rejoice with others – to celebrate life and its multifarious manifestations. We can rejoice to see people flourishing on their own terms – sailing their own way – under billowing sails.

Joy and empathy are grand emotions that help us grow as individuals, and our communities too.

It may be a truism, but the converse feelings such as hatred, bitterness and hostility do not only eat away at the person who harbours those feelings, but the rest of us, too.

For joy and empathy are the most powerful tools. You have proved that. And so I say: Thank you. Thank you for your voice, for your courage, and for what we have learned from you.

The state of the world is challenging. Human rights are at risk. We need leaders and change catalysts. And it is my sincere belief that in this struggle we need to adopt the methods of the queer community in Iceland. To opt for moderation, in a harsh world. To celebrate our differences.

For what is to be gained by constantly forming ourselves into opposing factions? Us and them.

In the end, it is a question of mindset. Spotting what unites us – not what may divide us. And in this we are all responsible – every single one of us.

I believe that the role of the president is inter alia to speak for minorities who are forced to fight for their right to exist, which should be a matter of course. I shall be supportive of all queer people – and I especially want to embrace the trans community in this context.

Dear friends. With gratitude in my heart, I want to quote the words of Þorvaldur Kristinsson, a former leader of Samtökin '78 – the National Queer Association of Iceland, in an address he delivered in the Free Church in 2010. I mention the date because it was so recently that queer people finally gained equal rights to family life.

Þorvaldur looked out over the church full of queer people, who had waited far too long for that moment. He said:

It is my most sincere wish for you that you may play an active role in human society every single day, and enjoy the dignity due to all people, wherever you are from and wherever you go.

But never forget what a precious gift it is to be queer and to see the world through queer eyes. May you have the spirit and power to share that special perspective with others, to teach them to see the world from the viewpoint that Mother Nature has bestowed on gays, lesbians and other queer people from birth, with her universally-known generosity.

Finally, I want to say to you: it is never wrong to love – and it is never wrong to be yourself.

May love flourish! Happy Reykjavík Pride!