



**Address
by President of Iceland
Halla Tómasdóttir
at a gala dinner hosted by
His Excellency King Frederik X
Christiansborg Palace
8 October 2024**

Deres Majestæt Kong Frederik den tiende,
Deres Majestæt Dronning Mary Elizabeth,
Deres Kongelige Højheder,
Deres Excellencer,
ministre,
mine damer og herrer!

Det er mig en stor ære at få lov at tale til Dem ved denne højtidelige ceremoni her på Christiansborg Slot. Jeg og min mand Björn vil gerne takke Kongeparret for den gæstfrihed, De har vist os og vores følge. Tusind tak.

A thousand thanks. An expression of gratitude that is common to all the Nordic languages. And a thousand thanks go but a short way to thank our gracious hosts for their warm welcome and hospitality.

With your permission, I would like to continue in English, as that is the language I have used in my previous visits and stays in Denmark – and the language (lingua franca) which all in this room, and beyond, understand.

The history of Iceland is intertwined with the history of your remarkable country, and that applies both to Iceland's interests as a whole and to the personal lives of so many of my fellow Icelanders who have at some point lived, studied or worked in Denmark. In fact, in a recent poll Denmark was voted the country where most Icelanders would like to live, if they were to move abroad. This reflects the strong bonds between the two nations – for centuries Denmark was our home away from home.

When we Icelanders were coming of age as an independent nation, many of our political leaders, poets and thinkers studied and lived in Denmark, and brought Danish influence and inspiration back home with them. To this day, Icelandic students flock to Denmark in great numbers to study in your universities. In so many ways, Icelandic identity has been shaped not only by our commonalities with Denmark, but also, I might add, by how we perceive ourselves as different. This year marks 80 year of the Icelandic republic. We cherish our independence, but we also cherish our history and our shared Nordic heritage. We know for a fact that Iceland stands stronger thanks to our Nordic family of nations.

On a personal note, I am happy to tell you that I am one of the lucky Icelanders who have lived in Denmark – and I enjoyed every minute of it. Your society offers the highest standard and quality of life – the best *hygge*. I can also add that my grandmother was adopted and raised by a "dansk købmand", a Danish merchant named Carl Jensen. Her name was Ína Jensen, and in our extended and sizable family we frequently, and quite proudly, refer to ourselves as "the Jensens". So, if my last name, Tómasdóttir, is a mouthful, feel free to refer to me as Halla Jensen, at least here in Denmark.

Denmark has long been renowned for superb architecture and design that is sought after, all over the world. In recent decades Danish filmmaking has excelled on the international screen, and we wonder: How do they do it? Increased cooperation in this important field opens opportunities to share strengths, from which the Nordic nations have benefitted. And Nordic Noir in both fiction and film is very successful. On another note, it seems that the world cannot get enough of our common heritage: the Vikings. It is rather amusing that the peace-loving Nordic nations should export endless stories of their anything but peaceful ancestors. This must be a so-called contradiction in identity, something that many nations are faced with.

This is my first state visit; I took office as President of Iceland only a couple of months ago. As a woman president of Iceland, I follow in the footsteps of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the first democratically-elected female head of state of any country. To follow in Vigdís's footsteps is something that fills me with both pride and a sense of responsibility. Not least here in Denmark, a country with which Vigdís bonded so closely, through her friendship with Her Majesty Queen Margrethe the Second, or *Margrét Þórhildur* as we know her in Iceland – as she was once princess of Iceland too and was given an Icelandic name. Neither of these distinguished ladies is with us in this room tonight, but their presence and warmth will always be felt when we think of the relationship between Denmark and Iceland.

It is with great satisfaction that I celebrate these two female leaders because I believe that with gender balance comes an important and much needed shift in the values that lie at the heart of our societies. We are more likely to care for people and the planet in societies that truly empower people and values across the gender spectrum. We are more likely to design and give birth to a better world when artists, designers and architects – and indeed all of us – tap into the full breadth of the creative genius that resides in all of us because equality is a key to a more peaceful, just and sustainable world.

And thankfully, these values, are cherished by our youth, "de smukke unge mennesker," as your beloved Kim Larsen put it. But I am also mindful of what is happening to our youth, because every day I hear stories of young people experiencing growing anxiety, apathy, isolation and loss of faith that a better future awaits them. It seems at times that the young have lost faith in the conversation between generations. It is ironic that, in times when we are constantly connected via smartphones and social media, people experience a generalized sense of disconnection – a loneliness epidemic that seems to particularly impact young people.

I don't have a magical solution to this, but I believe we should meet this difficult moment by making love our only weapon. After all, love is something we all possess. And we all long for kindness. Let us bring these elements to the forefront. Let us use them.

Going back to our identity. At the beginning of this speech, I spoke about the cultural phenomenon Nordic Noir. It expresses a piece of our identity. We may be perceived as a bit gloomy and cynical sometimes. But let us never forget that it is not just irony and cold calculation that keep us going – on the contrary: it is our inner warmth. *Nordic Warmth* may not sound as thrilling as *Nordic Noir* when it comes to fiction and films, but it is cooperation and caring for each other that connects us and makes our cold countries habitable.

So it will be and so it has been: *Hávamál* – the Words of the High One, our precious Eddic poem, a Nordic source of wisdom for more than a thousand years, emphasizes how friends must care for each other. I would like to recite a verse in Icelandic, if I may:

Veistu ef þú vin átt,
þann er þú vel trúir,
og vilt þú af honum gott geta,
geði skaltu við þann blanda
og gjöfum skipta,
fara að finna oft.

Jeg beder venligst alle, som er til stede her, om at rejse sig og hæve deres glas til ære for Hans Majestæt Kong Frederik 10. af Danmark og Hendes Majestæt Dronning Mary,

For Kongen og Dronningen! For venskab! Skál!