



**Address
by President of Iceland
Halla Tómasdóttir
at the opening of
the Arctic Circle Assembly**

**Reykjavík
17 October 2024**

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It's an honor to address the 2024 Assembly of the Arctic Circle. I'd like to congratulate the organizers of this important event and extend a warm welcome to all of you who have gathered here to discuss and highlight Arctic issues.

We are gathering at a time when the world is facing many complex challenges. The mother of all those challenges is the fact that our shared home, the planet, is in a precarious state. It's been nearly a decade since governments, business leaders and citizens alike came together in Paris and agreed that the rise of global surface temperature from pre-industrial levels must be kept under 1.5 degrees centigrade if we are to stay alive. Many COP conferences and multiple pledges later, the Earth is now heading for more than 2.5 degree warming and we know that tipping points in the climate system can lead to highly unpleasant surprises with levels of warming in the range of 1.5–2 degrees centigrade. And looking only at the climate dimension is insufficient as the Swedish scientist Johan Rockström explains – there are nine planetary boundaries that keep the Earth in balance, and we have already reached or surpassed six. Right here at Arctic Circle, prominent climate scientists are issuing a collective warning to the Nordic Council of Ministers, that there is a serious risk of a major ocean circulation change in the Atlantic. Series of scientific studies conducted over the past few years suggest that this risk has been greatly underestimated. Such an ocean circulation change would have devastating and irreversible impacts predominantly for Nordic countries, but also for other parts of the world.

As if the precarious state of our planet is not enough, we now live in a world where inequality within and between societies has reached unsustainable

levels. We are seeing unexpected roll-backs in hard-earned women's rights, gay rights, human rights, and journalistic and civic freedoms. Mis- and disinformation is wreaking havoc on our democracies – and our mental health – and we are at war, in as many as 50 areas in the world. Top that up with the Artificial Intelligence revolution, that holds the promise to solve some of our challenges, but without principles may very well cause more of them. All of these challenges are interdependent, and all of them call for brave conversations and bold collaborations, which is precisely what I hope we'll be using our time here at the Arctic Circle for.

At a time like this, every individual, organization, country and region must ask what role they might play in catalyzing a better-working world. I have high ambition for Iceland's role in the world and see it as our purpose to be a „land of solutions“ – to unlock our creativity from art to science to industry to solve the world's biggest challenges. I hope you'll use your time here to seek opportunities to join us and others in that ambition. The time has come where good people working together, can – and indeed must – show the world what is possible.

As we all know, the Arctic Council, which has been an extremely important venue for Arctic development for almost thirty years, is now impaired by the war Russia is waging in Europe. Russia is a key stakeholder in the Arctic, but its invasion of a neighboring country is totally unacceptable for other Arctic nations. Nevertheless, the Arctic still has plenty of problems to solve and solutions to show so inhabitants and friends of the Arctic region must bolster their cooperation and safeguard their long-term interests in a peaceful manner.

Science increasingly confirms that the Arctic region is „ground zero“ for tipping point risks and climate regulation across the planet. Several natural systems in the region can undergo rapid, irreversible, interconnected changes if we fail to limit this risk by reducing emissions as quickly as possible and stay on course to reach the 1.5 degree target set by the Paris Agreement.

We cannot fail in this mother of all missions and there is no reason to. We know the science and we have the technological solutions and also the capital needed to bring them to scale with speed. Let us use our time here at the Arctic Circle to crack the human science. Let us find ways to supercharge our courage and collaborate like our lives depend upon it – because they do!

Finally, I would like to thank my predecessor, Former President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, for leading the Arctic Circle for more than a decade – and all of you for your purposeful participation.

Thank you.