



**Speech by
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
in honour of
King Abdullah II and Queen Rania
at a Gala Dinner at Bessastaðir
26 May 2000**

Your Majesties
King Abdullah and Queen Rania
Honoured guests

It is with profound pleasure that I welcome Your Majesties to our historic residence Bessastaðir where the Icelandic nation treasures the memories of deeds and endeavours that have moulded our history for more than a thousand years.

We are deeply honoured by Your Majesties' visit and see it as a symbol of the determination to strengthen and enhance our friendship.

We fondly remember the occasions when Your Majesty's father, King Hussein, came to our country. The Icelandic people respected highly his courage and determination and his warm and generous spirit.

Since we knew from our own experience what it takes for a small nation to secure its place and achieve progress and prosperity, we perhaps understood better than others the enormous tasks facing the people of Jordan.

We have admired how Your Majesty has provided leadership and vision in line with the noble spirit of the Hashemite Royal tradition and sought at the same time to embark on the path to economic and social progress in the 21st century.

We hope the lessons we have learned here in Iceland and how we have, despite our smallness, achieved the creation of a prosperous high-

technology society, will provide Your Majesty with insights and encouragement. In many ways the new economy emerging at the dawn of the 21st century offers our small nations greater opportunities than ever before. There are now no inherited hindrances to restrict our potential for growth. Given the right conditions, our young generations have the potential to make our countries among the most successful in the world.

We were proud to show Your Majesty earlier today how young Icelanders have achieved leading positions in the fields of genetic research, information technology and computer software and to introduce to Your Majesty Queen Rania how we try to provide for the education and welfare of our children. We have witnessed Your interest in the well-being of the women in Your country, Your emphasis on equality, health and education. We note with great respect how Jordan has succeeded in achieving greater social integration and harmony among all its citizens than other countries in Your part of the world.

From our outpost in the North Atlantic we have admired how the people of Jordan have dealt with the difficulties, the tragedies and the extreme challenges which for decades have dominated the fate of the Middle East.

We have seen how crucial the leadership, the courage and the determination provided by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan have been for the search for peace and how the risks taken by Your Majesty's family and Your people have provided the key to successful negotiations and accords. These endeavours have earned the admiration and gratitude of all mankind and it is a special honour for us Icelanders to be able to express our support in a personal way.

The people of Iceland warmly wish Your Majesty sustained success in the search for permanent peace and prosperity in Your region. We feel a close kinship towards Your people, kinship moulded by the challenges facing small nations in the modern world, kinship strengthened by the experience of fighting for our survival against heavy odds, although the nature of the odds is different; in our case the threat is mainly from the forces of nature and the dramatic events of volcanic eruptions and heavy seas; in Your case it consists of hostilities, wars and violent struggles which so have so tragically destroyed peace and harmony among nations.

Your Majesty.

From the early days of Your reign, You have shown inner strength and personal determination in Your search for peace and prosperity. It is now the task for us and all other nations to provide You and Your people

with the necessary support and the required means. What is at stake is not just the future of Your country but the determination by mankind to provide peace and security for all, to pave the way for the well-being of men and women, young and old.

It is with this vision that we welcome and honour Your Majesties here tonight and I ask our distinguished guests to rise and salute the friendship of our peoples, to salute the secure and prosperous future of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and to salute Their Majesties, King Abdullah and Queen Rania.