



**A Speech  
by  
the President of Iceland  
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson  
at the dinner  
in honour of the President of Djibouti  
H.E. Ismail Omar Guelleh  
Bessastaðir  
19 February 2007**

Distinguished President  
Your Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to welcome President Ismail Omar Guelleh and his distinguished delegation to Iceland and to be your host tonight here at Bessastaðir, the historic Presidential Residence. It was here that our independence struggle began in the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a small group of students and intellectuals initiated the campaign, publishing periodicals and creating societies to further the cause of national freedom and self-determination in a movement not unlike the struggle for national sovereignty in the former colonies of Africa.

For centuries, Iceland was literally the poorest country in Europe, a nation of farmers and fishermen, a colony like those that used to be found in Africa, without any economic or political rights, dominated by foreign rulers.

The Icelandic independence campaign lasted more than one hundred years until the Republic was finally established in 1944. Admittedly this was a more peaceful campaign and one that required fewer sacrifices than were suffered by our brothers and sisters in Africa. But the heritage of the independence struggle has in our case also had a strong influence on our culture and our traditions, on the policies and the politics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Thus, Iceland is perhaps the only European country which can sympathize in the light of its own experience with the fate of Africa, with the heroic task of bringing nations out of poverty and foreign rule into independence and economic advancement.

Even the establishment of the Republic was not our final victory. We had to secure the economic foundation of our existence by driving the British, the German, the Belgian and other foreign fishing fleets out of our territorial waters. First by extending the economic zone to 12 miles, then to 50 and finally to 200 miles. Each time the British sent their war ships in order to stop us, but each time we succeeded in defeating the British navy; probably the only nation to do so; not once but three times.

The Icelandic nation still remembers how the Organization of African Unity was the only international institution to express support for the Icelandic cause in the 1970s and sent a special delegation to Iceland to express African solidarity with our struggle.

The reason why I am bringing this piece of history to your attention here tonight is the relevance it has to the future of our mission.

Although Iceland was once the poorest country in Europe, a colony without economic or political rights, my nation has succeeded within the lifetime of one generation in achieving the highest living standard in the world, with per capita income of USD 36,000; it has also succeeded in creating health-care and education systems that are open to all, without financial restrictions, and on a par with the best available elsewhere in the world.

How has this been possible? The reason lies largely in the utilization of our energy resources, by tapping into the goldmines of geothermal power which God Almighty decided to grant us when the Earth was created – and the Almighty decided to show similar goodwill towards East Africa.

It is now up to us, through cooperation, technological expertise and constructive alliances in finance and investment, to make the most of His generous gifts.

We in Iceland have in recent years decided to share our experience and know-how increasingly with others and have become involved in geothermal projects in many different parts of the world, in California as well as in China, in Europe as well as in Russia. Our energy and engineering companies, banks and leading investors are now determined to enhance our global role in this field.

Your visit, distinguished President, fits well into this framework. It also demonstrates an important part of our growing involvement with Africa, of our global vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Clean energy and Africa make a powerful combination, especially at a time when global leaders, Presidents and Prime Ministers, scientists and CEOs of dominant corporations, industrial companies and financial institutions all over the world are uniting in an effort to prevent climate change.

I am convinced that our dialogue and your visit will be the beginning of a constructive and productive relationship which will lead to important energy projects and strengthen the foundations for economic growth in Djibouti and be an example to other countries in East Africa.

As you heard earlier today and will be able to confirm in your discussions tomorrow, Icelandic energy companies, banks, financial investors, experts and scientists are keenly interested in advancing our discussion on the utilisation of geothermal energy in East Africa.

Hopefully the Summit which we had planned together with professor Jeffrey Sachs and invited leaders of Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and other East African countries to attend will take place in the near future. I am profoundly grateful for your willingness to host the Summit in Djibouti and applaud your invitation to the leaders of your neighbouring countries.

In this way, our efforts could form the basis of concrete dialogue on the geothermal energy potential in each of the East African countries, a positive and friendly framework for potential investors and national leaders to examine together the viability of different projects.

The Icelandic side is ready to facilitate this process of geothermal cooperation and share our experience, expertise and connections with you in order to further discussions involving all those who can make relevant contributions.

The new century offers fascinating opportunities for our countries to cooperate in new ways. Your visit is a strong demonstration of the will to reach across continents and oceans in order to establish partnerships and joint projects.

It is in this spirit that I welcome you, distinguished President, and your delegation here tonight and ask our guests to rise and salute the friendship between our peoples and the success of our efforts.