



**Speech by
the President of Iceland
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson**

**at the opening of
the Nordic Museum**

**Seattle
5 May 2018**

Your royal highness,
excellencies,
dear guests

“We share Nordic culture with people of all ages and backgrounds by exhibiting art and objects, preserving collections, providing educational and cultural experiences, and serving as a community gathering place.”

Dear friends! I welcome you to the opening of the new Nordic Museum here in Seattle. The words I just quoted are the maxim of the museum, its *purpose*. In the Nordic region we can say the word purpose in different ways in our old languages. Here it is, in the alphabetical order of Danish, Faroese, Finnish, Greenlandic, Icelandic, Norwegian, Sami and Swedish: formål, andamál, tarkoitus, siunertaq, tilgangur, hensikt, áigumuš and ändamål.

Though the words we use are so different, we share this common purpose. And we are honoured and proud to share our Nordic culture with you here in Seattle, in this wonderful setting. This new museum is a tribute to the links that bind together the Nordic region and the United States, links that existed briefly when Norse voyagers reached the eastern shores of this continent some thousand years ago, but were truly forged with the great emigrations to North America in the nineteenth century.

The doors of the new Nordic Museum have now been opened. Let us always remember and cherish its purpose, the promotion of Nordic culture. But what is Nordic culture? As this museum will demonstrate, it is diverse and

dynamic, traditional and innovative. Culture is the old and the new, the unique and the multicultural.

And culture can be our haven, a tribute to beauty and truth, our shelter against oppression and injustice. In the late nineteenth century, Jónína Jónsdóttir emigrated from Iceland to North America. She was a poor maid, but also the first Icelandic woman to publish a collection of her own poetry – poems which she found time to compose despite a life of hard work. In one of her verses Jónína speaks of her salvation from the hardship of this world – the shelter of words, the shelter of culture:

Yet, I have a shelter,
that never fails,
where my weary spirit
always wanders.
Let me not,
sweet Lord,
lose that haven,
as long as I live.

Ladies and gentlemen! Let the new Nordic Museum be a shelter and haven for people of all ages and backgrounds, people who value culture in all its shapes and forms, people who value free spirit and free expression. I congratulate those who have worked so hard to design, construct and open this grand museum, a testimony to Nordic culture and heritage, as well as the strong ties between the Nordic countries and North America.