

Speech by Jónas Ketilsson at the graduation of the UNU-GTP Fellows 2013

Honourable minister, director, former director, distinguished guests and graduates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is truly an honour and a privilege to be speaking to you all today on behalf of my Director General, Professor Guðni Johannesson, who unfortunately could not be with you here today but he would like me to send you his apologies and warmest regards and we both want to say congratulations to all those who are graduating and honour you for all the hard work and sacrifices you have made to be here today with the support of your mentors.

I am a father of two young children, and as part of my work I travel abroad, and I know from experience that leaving your world behind and journey into the unknown is not the easiest decision to make as a parent. After visiting countries that some are represented here today I can just imagine how alien Iceland must have struck you, with the ice-cold front that hits you when you exit the terminal in Keflavik and this strange landscape that surrounds you on the way to the capital area. Full of volcanoes, that lava each other, an example of who truly rules this island. As alien as the rain forests of the Philippines sounded to my son this autumn when describing the animals, the birds and fruits that surrounded me, or the deserts around Dubai on the way back to Iceland, so must sound alien for your family members this strange island in the north where 300 thousand souls, so-called Icelanders live, descendants of vikings and what not.

This year, well it simply rained in Reykjavik, and it started of in June to be really, well the wettest summer since 1955! An experience for you all to remember when your children and grandchildren complain about how hot it is in your countries, you can just think back, relax and tell stories of the cold days in Iceland, and they will probably level off very quickly.

Knowing that you are in the safe hands of the qualified administration of the UNU-GTP, an administration that has shown in numerous occasions in the past their true character in securing your fellows safety, well being and your fellows enjoyment throughout the duration of your stay here in Iceland, we at Orkustofnun are rest assured chances are you will survive.

I have now worked in this building for almost ten years and so have come accustomed to springtime here at Orkustofnun referring to a special season of the year when the building is sort of rejuvenated with people from all over the world taking some warmth and smiles with you which for those working in this building is one of the tokens of springtime and brings energetic joy to Orkugarður, the Energy Garden of Knowledge here in Iceland.

As you graduate now from UNU-GTP most of you will soon return to your homes and start working again within the institutions and companies you represent. When coming back I am certain that you will be able to make use of your studies here in Iceland and influence the future of your countries. When thinking of your future I would try to set out for goals to be reached far ahead in your lifetime, no matter how far away they might be and how many obstacles you are afraid you will face on your journey. If you know where you are going then every step you take, will take you closer to your next milestone and sooner than you realize you will have achieved far more than you could have anticipated.

An example of this can be found in the book of the travels of reverend Ólafur Egilsson, which Gudmundur Steingrímsson, an Icelandic politician, referenced in his speech at Althingi this autumn. In the summer of 1627, pirates from the north coast of Africa raided Iceland, taking close to four hundred captives away into slavery. Among those taken was Reverend Ólafur, a Lutheran Minister in his sixties which tells a story how he negotiated a ransom agreement with his captors

and then travelled from North Africa across each country of Europe, every step taking him closer to his goal; to reach back to Vestman Islands. This extraordinary journey of Reverend Ólafur, is but an example of what can be achieved when you know what you want to do and how you want to go about it.

Dear fellows,

I hope that graduating today will be one of your milestones when reflecting back on your lives at a later stage. I doubt you will remember my speech, no hard feelings there. You might remember all our Icelandic volcanoes that lava each other, what you will never forget, I'm sure of is the cold weather, but more importantly it is my hope that you will be able to strengthen the ties you have built with your fellow peers that sit next to you so that your stay here in Iceland, for six months, is really just the first milestone on a life-long journey of collaboration to enhance the development of geothermal all around the world for our common goal of a better future for the next generations.

And keep in mind that with modern telecommunication the distance between is irrelevant for those that know each other and carry on keeping in touch and as you know the alumni of UNU GTP is one of the best and so chances are we will meet again at future international venues. But through this all keep in mind your future milestones, keep in mind your future goals. Although I hope none of us will ever have to go through Reverend Ólafur experience, that I mentioned earlier, I think we can learn a great deal from moving stories like this one that if we know where we are heading and how, each day the sun rises we will be closer to our milestone, even though the sky descendent upon you every now and then, you know the goal, one goal that you have reached today, a goal of education for the advancement of knowledge and the dissemination of truth as John. F. Kennedy once said.

Again, dear fellows congratulations. Takk fyrir.