Dear fellows of the United Nations University Geothermal Training Programme, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a real honor for me as the Minister for Industry, Energy and Commerce, to have the opportunity to address you today at this 37th graduation ceremony of the UNU Geothermal Training Program.

After this graduation, you will be among the 613 fellows from 59 countries who have completed the six-month training program here in Iceland.

Renewable energy resources are not distributed evenly around the world. Here in Iceland we are fortunate enough to have plenty of renewable energy resources – mainly hydropower and geothermal energy – which we use to our advantage in our daily life.

As you have learned during your time here in Iceland that, we take pride in our energy situation. All of our electricity generation is from hydropower or geothermal energy. Over 90% of all houses in Iceland are heated with geothermal, and the remaining 10% heated with green electricity.

But there is more to geothermal energy than electricity production, heating and swimming pools. Innovation brings new ideas which are being developed to create more value from this valuable resource. This includes new technology for traditional usage – such as drying fish products for export and farming of tropical fish species – to more novel products such as cosmetics from the minerals in the geothermal brine, and production of synthetic fuels from the gases associated with the geothermal steam. The possibilities in terms of geothermal utilization seem endless.

We are convinced that geothermal energy utilization should become one of the primary methods of reducing greenhouse-gas effects, and by further developing technologies for harnessing the heat inside our planet, many countries will play an important role in reducing the use of fossil fuels. And of course that means that you, the geothermal experts, will have to be on board – and in the forefront of this development.

We are honored and happy to share our experience and knowledge of harnessing geothermal resources with others, and in this the UNU-GTP is our pride and joy.

Although I have always valued the UNU Geothermal training program very highly, I was reminded of its value and importance earlier this year, when I attended the World Geothermal Congress in Melbourne, Australia – often referred to as the Olympics of the geothermal sector. There I met many former UNU fellows, many of whom are now leading the geothermal sector in their respective countries. And I also noticed how warmly former UNU fellows spoke of Iceland and the time they spent here.

It opened my eyes to the importance of the program and to the fact that the geothermal sector worldwide is aware of its existence and thinks highly of it. This might also be the reason why Icelandic experts in this field and the various Icelandic companies that participate in geothermal exploration and utilization around the world are widely respected.

The energy sector has long been dominated by men. It is important that we get more women into this sector and I think we are slowly getting there. I know that those who have been

leading the UNU Geothermal Training Program have been aware of the importance of attracting more women into the geothermal sector, and I think that is worth mentioning. Out of the 613 students that have graduated, 127 were women, that is, 21%. We need to do better – but we are getting there, so keep up the good work!

For us, renewable energy is all about geothermal and hydropower, but when I speak to my colleagues at international meetings, the renewable concept for them is more about ‘wind, solar and biomass', and sometimes hydropower. Very rarely do they mention geothermal. This is what we want to change and bring more awareness of geothermal energy worldwide.

Orkustofnun (the National Energy Authority) has been involved in several projects in Europe on the promotion of geothermal energy. And now the Ministry, in cooperation with the geothermal cluster in Iceland, is focusing on the promotion of the sector in Europe. There are great opportunities in the utilization of geothermal energy in Europe, not least for space heating. We need to help decision makers to realize the possibilities of utilizing geothermal, instead of using imported fossil fuel.

In April next year, the Iceland Geothermal Congress 2016 will be held here in Reykjavik. Hopefully some of you will have the opportunity to come and visit again next spring and participate in the conference.

At the very least, I hope you will all be able to participate in the World Geothermal Congress that will take place here in Iceland 2020. Actually, my idea is that it might be a wonderful opportunity for all the former fellows of the UNU Geothermal Training Program to visit Reykjavik and have a reunion.

Time can be measured in many different ways. If we think of our lifetime, six months might not been seen as a long time – but six months away from family and friends, in a strange and different country, is a long time. I think that it shows courage and determination of you to come to Iceland and to live and work here for six months.

But this time has been important as we have now more experts than before in how to harness geothermal energy in a sustainable manner. All of you are now part of an important network of geothermal experts. Welcome to our group of Geothermal Ambassadors!

Dear Fellows, I really hope that you have enjoyed your time here in Iceland and I wish you and your families back home all the best in the future.