



PRESIDENT OF ICELAND

Bessastaðir,
7 May, 2020

H.E. Andrzej Duda
President of the Republic of Poland
Warsaw

Dear President

Thank you for your letter of April 28th, highlighting the Covid-19 pandemic and how the nations of the world should work together to defy this threat to public health. I certainly agree that we must use this opportunity to improve international collaboration in fighting the challenges mankind is facing. Like you, I start thinking about environmental issues when future challenges are mentioned, since the ongoing climate changes will inevitably create serious problems in most countries. Global threats can only be tackled with strong international cooperation. And, like you, we in Iceland support respect for international law and human rights.

One aspect of the Covid-19 pandemic is particularly worrying, the fact that it will be hard to eradicate among the very poor, since their access to healthcare services is limited. If low-income countries do not get the assistance they need, the consequences can be serious not only for these countries, but they may also threaten the security and political stability of our own region.

Together with our Nordic neighbors, Iceland has emphasized the importance of cooperation and the role of regional and global institutions, including the United Nations, in our efforts to overcome Covid-19. Once a vaccine has been developed, it is important that it will be made available to all, regardless of their purchasing power.

Previous epidemics, like HIV and Ebola, have demonstrated that those who belong to marginalized groups and fragile communities are the most vulnerable. The pandemics increase the risks of inequality and armed conflict, and existing structural gender inequalities are amplified.



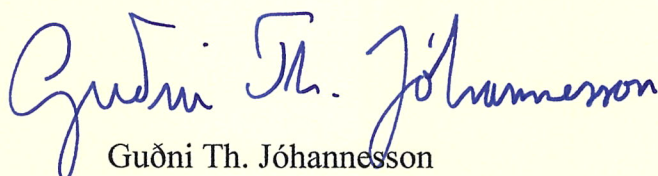
Every country must respond to Covid-19 in its own way, but we will continue to advocate an open and responsible approach, relying on international cooperation and scientific consultation. We will also robustly tackle disinformation, counting on international partners to do the same.

At the national level my government will strive to protect the economy and public health of our citizens. But at the same time, we have both a moral and a practical obligation to contribute to halt the pandemic internationally. For Iceland, like for so many other countries, international trade and cooperation is a prerequisite for our well-being.

We have observed that all over the world, governments have restricted human rights and personal freedom to reduce the dispersion of the Covid-19 virus. But it is important that these restrictions be removed in due course so that citizens can continue to enjoy their unalienable human rights. We Icelanders believe that the rule-of-law and mass-media that are free to criticize authorities are the bedrock of democratic societies.

Dear President: Allow me also to use this opportunity to thank you for the great State Visit you and your wife hosted in March.

To follow up on the visit, I believe there are many fields in which there is scope for deepening and strengthening our relations. Poland is an important trade partner for Iceland, the cultural relationship is flourishing, not least because of the activities of the many people of Polish origin in Iceland. There is great potential in cooperation in the field of geothermal energy, which could help Poland reach its climate goals. There are other areas, including the fields of gender equality, the fish industry and information technology, just to name a few. The Government of Iceland will also continue to work towards strengthening our bilateral cultural and educational relations, as was decided by the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministers of Education of our countries.


Guðni Th. Jóhannesson