



**Madame Minister of Tourism, colleagues, and other distinguished guests.**

The designing of tourist sites is a worthy cause for debate and certainly a challenge in respect of the circumstances that prevail in Iceland. This seminar is held in conjunction with the annual convention of the Nordic organizations of landscape architects. Every two years we organize a special event, or a Nordic seminar, like the one held here today.

It is indeed a pleasure to see how many and different groups show their interest in this important matter by attending the seminar. The increased number of tourists over the last few years and the extended tourist season in Iceland are issues that have been subject to much discussion and something which we have worked towards in the course of the last 10 to 15 years. This has been deemed as being the key to strengthening tourism in Iceland. We realize, however, that not everything is gained by an increased number of tourists and an extended tourist season if the circumstances and conditions of the environment are unable to receive this mass of tourists during sensitive periods of the year. In fact, we are experiencing a certain degree of objection by nature!

The tolerance limits of several tourist sites speak for themselves. The debate, particularly last winter and again last spring, has been quite loud, whereas the solutions as mentioned have not always been in tune with what the stakeholders in tourism want to hear: Namely, the closing of areas and restricting access!

But, what should we do? Hopefully we will get some answers to this pressing question here today - answers that will give us an insight into how these matters have been addressed in other countries. There is no reason for us to repeatedly re-invent the wheel, as several nations possess decades of experience in designing and planning access to tourist sites.

The establishment of the Development Fund for Tourist Sites constitutes a large step in the right direction. The operation of the fund was launched on 18 August 2011. At this point the grants allocated by the fund total ISK 576 million for designing, planning and developing tourist sites. Thereof some ISK 120 million has been used on preparing development at the sites with landscape architects and architects being in the lead, as well as chartered civil engineers, planning experts and specialists in the field of preparing and applying for grants from the fund.

We, who work within this spectrum wholeheartedly welcome these focal points and consider it essential that this fund continues to generate and facilitate effective measures to structure good conditions for tourists in the future. Let us show our respect for nature and the landscape. Nature and our country deserve it!

It is important that we continue to welcome tourists to Iceland without sacrificing the quality, the strong experience and the attractive environment Iceland has to offer as a tourist destination. Let us continue to utilize the expert designers and professionals who are prepared to strengthen the tourist sites and to improve access to them without sacrificing the experience and pleasure of those traveling in Iceland.

Let us enjoy today and I am certain that we will experience a few “aha” impacts of the presentations at the seminar.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the organizers and the sponsors I am honored to extend our heartfelt welcome to you all and to declare this seminar as open.

Hermann Georg Gunnlaugsson  
President of the Federation of Icelandic  
Landscape Architects FÍLA

