

**UNU Land Restoration Training Programme
Graduation Ceremony
September 19, 2013**

**Address by
H. E. Mr. Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson
Minister for Foreign Affairs**

Dear UNU fellows, Director and employees of the UNU Land Restoration Training Programme,

ladies and gentlemen, dear friends.

It is a true pleasure to address all of you today on this fourth graduation ceremony of the UNU Land Restoration Training Programme - and the first one for me as a Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Today there are 10 fellows graduating from this programme, five women and five men. Allow me to congratulate all of you for your successful completion of your training. You have worked hard over the past six months and I am sure this has been a challenging period – both personally and professionally – but today you are harvesting! I am certain that your training and experience will benefit your home-countries and your work will play a part in making our planet more sustainable.

Allow me to extend my congratulations to Hafdís Hanna and her team. In cooperation with you fellows and the programme's former students, they have built a programme we can all be proud of.

Land degradation and its' consequences and effects are among the most serious hazards for coming generations. Land degradation hinders sustainable development globally and especially in developing countries. A continuation of current trends over the next 25 years could have alarming consequences. It could

reduce global food production while population continues to grow in addition to rising incomes and changing consumer patterns that are expected to greatly increase food demand. These needs will not be met in a sustainable manner unless we preserve and restore the productivity of our land. At the same time, climate change is a transformative factor that must be taken into account from the very beginning.

At the Rio+20 Conference last year, Iceland was one of the countries that advocated for land restoration. It was a truly happy moment at the end of the conference when world leaders did commit to strive for a land degradation neutral world. Over the next few months, Iceland will continue to emphasise the importance of Land Restoration – especially in the context of the Post 2015 Development Agenda and the discussions around the Sustainable Development Goals.

With that in mind, a ‘Group of Friends of Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought’ was launched in New York earlier this month. The Group of Friends was initiated by Iceland and Namibia and acts as an informal interest group and forum for informal discussions. The aim is to maintain the momentum generated by Rio+20 in the context of Post-2015 development agenda.

Desertification is an area in which Iceland can certainly have an added value. Not only have we accumulated important knowledge through our own experience from our own land, but also do we host this programme - the UNU Land Restoration Training Programme – which truly is our flagship in this regard.

Dear friends,

Let me also use this opportunity to congratulate the UNU Land Restoration Training Programme on its new Gender Equality Strategy. I know this aspect

has always been included in the programme, but it is important to have a formal policy-paper with objectives and indicators with the aim of measuring its implementation. We know that regardless of context, gender perspectives must be included. As a country where gender equality is considered to be among the highest in the world, Iceland must lead by example – and the Land Restoration Training Programme sure is!

Finally, let me conclude by congratulating you fellows once again on your graduation. You, and all the fellows who have graduated from this training programme, are great testimonials on how one country can help another through knowledge sharing. And to be clear – the knowledge sharing goes both ways!

I wish you a safe journey back to your homes and would like to encourage you to stay in touch with new friends in Iceland, fellow professionals and each other in the years to come.

Thank you.