

**UNU Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme
Graduation Ceremony
May 31, 2013**

**Address by
Mr. Hermann Örn Ingólfsson
Director General for International and Security Affairs
Ministry for Foreign Affairs**

- Dear fellows, Director of the UNU Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends.
- This is indeed a special day for all of us here today. Not only for the eight fellows who are graduating, but also for the GEST Programme and the Icelandic Government as we celebrate the inclusion of the newest member into the family of UNU Training Programmes, hosted in Iceland.
- GEST is a formidable addition to the United Nations University as a whole and will – and has – strengthened the gender equality dimension of the existing Programmes not only in Iceland but throughout the UNU system.
- Allow me to warmly congratulate UNU-GEST for this important achievement. Irma, Annadís and all the other staff at GEST and the Edda Centre of Excellence – without your dedication and hard work, this Programme wouldn't have flourished like it has.

- It is a special pleasure to address this group of fellows, who are the first to graduate after the formal inclusion of GEST into the UNU family.
- To you, let me say: Congratulations on your achievements during your six months stay in Iceland. I am sure that when you return home, big challenges await you. I trust that your education and training at GEST has equipped you with necessary knowledge, tools and effective approaches in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in your home countries.
- Increased gender equality and women's empowerment are among the fundamental factors in creating a prosperous and just society.
- According to the World Bank, poverty tends to be lower in countries with greater gender equality and on the UN Human Development Index, countries with more gender equality rank higher. Reducing the gap between men and women can have a positive impact on economic productivity, improve the health of the population and contribute to a more just society by making institutions more representative.
- In fact, how can a society move forward when a large portion of its population is left behind?
- Iceland is among the countries where advancement towards gender equality has been steady and forward as evidenced by

various international indexes, most notably the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap. However, there is no room for complacency and we must always stay alert for seeking new opportunities but also for possible backlashes.

- In Iceland, it is universally accepted that gender equality is a basic human right and Icelandic law is based on the principle that all human beings are equal, regardless of their gender.
- This translates into other policy areas and therefore, advancing gender equality is both a crosscutting issue and a priority area in itself in the Strategy for Iceland's International Development Cooperation, which was recently adopted by our Parliament - Althingi.
- It is further accredited in the new Gender Equality Policy in Iceland's Development Cooperation – where it is stated that increased gender equality and women's empowerment is not only a basic human right – but a prerequisite for sustainable development and the advancement of the Millennium Development Goals.
- Iceland has also recently issued a second National Action Plan for the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution no. 1325 on Women, Peace and Security for the period 2013-2016.

- Dear Fellows
- We have from the initiation of the GEST Programme, had the pleasure of receiving the fellows at the Ministry as a part of their module on 1325. These meetings have been an important part of our work on the subject, not only incredibly informing but also very informal and the discussions very frank. The fellows – you – have provided us with great input in our work on women, peace and security and your ideas and experiences fed into the development of our second National Action Plan. We would welcome if these visits were to become a permanent part of our cooperation.
- Dear friends
- Let me conclude by congratulating you again on your graduation. I trust that you have enjoyed your stay in Iceland - both on a professional level but also on a personal level. Iceland can be a bit cold and unwelcoming but at least you have seen the beginning of summer and the bright nights that we look forward to the whole winter.
- Now, enjoy the rest of the day and the days left in Iceland and have a safe trip home.
- Thank you.