

Address by the President of the Republic of Iceland Asgeir Asgeirsson to the Knesset Plenum on March 28 1966

(Unofficial translation from the Hebrew transcript)

Mr. Speaker, honorable Members of the Knesset. I would like to thank you for your heartwarming words. It is a privilege and honor for me to visit the Knesset – a symbol of the parliamentary system that both our nations see as a vital condition for freedom and liberty. Despite differences between our countries, their democracy is the same, and therefore we speak a common language and understand one another.

You represent a new nation and yet an ancient one, in a new country that is yet an ancient one. Tradition and religion are clearly a basis for your actions. There are not many nations, perhaps none, that have been exiled from their country numerous times and for extended periods of time, and there is probably no nation that could have preserved its nationality for such a long time, in the special conditions it was in, and that eventually succeeded in founding its state in its destined ancient land.

It is surely not an easy task to work a deserted land and create a nation from its exiled parts, each having different languages and traditions. It is for this reason easy to see what a great task it is to gather these parts into one nation and one language.

Much has been told about the great things that have been done throughout the years since the Jewish nation began returning to its ancient land. If there is a way for people to gain their land, it is through cultivation.

The crusaders could not accomplish such a thing and therefore did not settle in this land. Never, in human history, could small nations keep themselves safe as they can in our days, and they of course have the strength of mutual cooperation and friendship. The relations between Israel and Iceland are good; many of my country's citizens visit Israel – the land of the Bible. To the best of my knowledge, the first Icelandic to visit this land did so approximately 1,000 years ago. Our cultural and commercial contacts also serve as a good basis for further development.

I am grateful for what you have said today, Mr. Speaker, in honor of my country and people, and I am thankful for the opportunity I was given today to visit the sister-parliament, the Knesset.

They usually say that Great Britain is the mother of parliaments, and in 1930 – on the celebration of 1,000 years to the Icelandic Althingi, a respectable representative of the United Kingdom said: "If my country is named the "Mother of Parliaments," the Icelandic Althingi is surely a "Grandmother of Parliaments."

Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to further discuss the issues I have mentioned. I express my best wishes to the Knesset and Israeli people. It is from the depth of the hearts of the Icelandic people that we wish the Israeli people to live in peace and prosperity from now on.