

**Opening speech of Zonta International District 13th Conference in
Akureyri
8 – 11 September 2011**

Ragnheiður Hansdóttir District Governor

Good morning , god morgen.

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir former president of Iceland and an Honorary Member
of Zonta International

Lynn Mc Kenzie President Elect of Zonta International

Geir Kristinn Aðalsteinsson Chairman of Akureyri town council

Irma Ertman the Finnish Ambassador in Iceland

Past International Directors:

Dögg Pálsdóttir, Maria Østergaard Jose Landeira , Ragna Karlsdóttir who
also is the Chairman of the International OMC Committee and Heddy
Tangen Steffensen and

Past Governor Kari Vieth, my Board, the Chairmen of the District
committees and you all Zontians from Denmark, Lithuania, Norway and
Iceland.

I want to welcome you all to this Conference of Zonta International in
District 13.

In the last century Reverend Matthías Jochumsson who resided in Akureyri
wrote the following poem:

Í sálarþroska svanna
býr sigur kynslóðanna
Hvað er menning manna
ef menntun vantar snót.

It was translated into English by another minister in Akureyri named Haukur
Ágústsson.

In maiden soul's maturity
is mankind's triumph found
and what is civil humanity
if maidens'schooling's not sound

This is actually in the spirit of Zonta, to accept that women are an important half of mankind and that their education is valuable. Matthias Jochumsson who was born in 1835 must have been ahead of his generation since he understood just how important women's role in society is.

We are proud of him.

Illiteracy is one of the problems that Zonta wants to eliminate. So many women in the world have not got the opportunity to go to school and learn to read. I have tried to imagine how my life would be if I were not able to read or write. I find the thought unbearable.

It is Zonta's mission to improve the status of women worldwide. In District 13 we emphasize on following this specific purpose of Zonta. We focus on women's issues.

The theme of this Conference is Gender and Climate Change.

Climate change is a global problem that affects every human being in the world but women and men are affected differently. Climate change particularly affects poor, developing countries. Women are 70% of those living below the poverty line. Hence, women are often more vulnerable to climate related disasters than men. Climate change trigger natural disasters such as flooding, storms and droughts which affect women seriously. In the developing countries women have the role to be producers and they are responsible for their household's food, water, fuel and income. Women produce between 60 – 80 % of the food in these countries. In addition to this all kinds of violence against women is very common in the aftermath of a natural disaster.

Consumption is important and every one of us can diminish greenhouse gas emissions by changing our way of living. Women can have influence in their household. Some people say that women can save the world.

In the following lectures on the theme we will hear valuable information about these issues. I must say that I look forward to listening to the young scientists. It is our duty to preserve our precious planet and hand it undamaged over to our children and grandchildren.

But the purpose of this Conference is not only to work hard on Zonta's issues. We will make new friends and meet old friends and have a nice time

together. Some of you are visiting Iceland for the first time and are going to see our waterfalls, hot springs, mountains and glaciers, hear our music, listen to our language, swim in our swimming pools, eat our food, and taste our wine and beer and in the end you will laugh in Icelandic. We Zontians in Iceland are very proud of our beautiful country.

In the old Edda poem Völuspa they say that if you have a good friend you should visit him often and there is always a short distance to a good friend.

I have spoken English until now but I will also say few words in Danish.

Hjertelig velkommen allesammen til denne konference. Vi er så glade at I er kommet hertil. Ved denne Konference vil vi arbejde i den retning at fremme kvinders status. Vi vil lytte til foredrag om Køn og Klimaforandringer. Vi vil finde ud om vi kan gøre noget for at bevare jorden så ren som muligt for vores børn og børnebørn. Hver eneste person kan hjælpe med sine indkøb og sin livsstil.

Men vi skal også hygge os sammen og træffe nye venner og møde gamle venner. I vil også lære Island at kende og vi er meget stolte af vores kønne land med den smukke natur.

I thank my hard working Conference Committees for their good work and I wish us all an efficient and interesting Conference and I declare that this Conference is opened.