

Making a Nation

Your Royal Majesty, Mr President and First Lady, Ministers, and dear People of Iceland.

My name is Jelena Ciric. I was born in Serbia, but my journey to Iceland took me through Canada, Spain and Mexico.

I am one of many individuals of foreign extraction who have recently immigrated to Iceland. According to Registers Iceland, we make up a little over 12 % of the current population of Iceland.

As for myself, I immigrated here two and a half years ago. What kind of connection could I then have to the history of Iceland in the last 100 years, when Iceland was forming its identity as a nation? But what is a nation, if not its people, and what is made by its people?

Iceland's sovereignty did not just happen of and by itself. It was made by people. Although in the 20th century there have been many countries that have gained sovereignty by blood and through war, Iceland's sovereignty was made by art. The men of Fjölfnir were among those who awakened the Icelandic people's desire for independence through their writings and poems.

I am a musician, and that occupation has taught me how great a part our creativity plays. Art is powerful because it offers the world new opportunities. Works of art ask us: Can the world be made differently? This is how all change begins.

However, the biggest act of creation I have taken on is to be an immigrant, because that is also a creative occupation. As immigrants we are forced to recreate ourselves in order to thrive in a new country. In that process we are not only the artist, but also the medium.

100 years ago, the people of Iceland used creativity in response to a changing world. But now it is changing faster than ever before, and even more creativity is needed in order to respond. New attitudes, new technologies and new solutions are needed to respond to new challenges.

It is a lucky country where 12 % of the inhabitants are specialists in creativity, for a nation is people and what those people create.

Dear immigrants: the life and art you create here matter. You are making the nation.

Dear native-born Icelanders, on behalf of us immigrants I want to say: we look forward to making the next 100 years with you.

Thank you.