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New Icelandic Government formed

A Government of the Social Democratic Alliance and the Left-Green Movement took office on February 1, 2009. The previous government, headed by Prime Minister Geir H. Haarde, resigned last week as a result of the global financial crisis in Iceland.

The economic policy of the Government will be based on the program already established by the authorities and the International Monetary Fund, IMF. The two parties agree on the importance of holding early elections, set for April 25, 2009.

Mrs. Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir is the new Prime Minister, but she was Minister for Social Affairs and Social Security in the previous government. Mrs. Sigurðardóttir is the first woman to be the Prime Minister of Iceland. Mr. Össur Skarphéðinsson is the new Minister for Foreign Affairs and he will continue as the Minister of Industry, Energy and Tourism, as in the previous government.

Press release from the Prime Minister's Office:

<http://eng.forsaetisraduneyti.is/news-and-articles/nr/3369>



NATO Conference in Iceland

The Government of Iceland in co-operation with NATO hosted a seminar in Reykjavik on January 29, 2009, on "Security Prospects in the High North". The aim of the seminar was to bring together ministers, officials and academics from NATO countries, NATO headquarters and others to discuss current and future strategic implications of the developments in the High North for the Alliance and individual Allies.

The opening address was delivered by Mr. Geir H. Haarde, Prime Minister. The keynote speech was given by Mr. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Secretary General of NATO. Mrs. Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, Minister for Foreign Affairs, chaired the seminar.



New Ambassador

Mr. Hjálmar W. Hannesson is the new Ambassador of Iceland to the United States. He replaces Mr. Albert Jónsson, who has taken up his new post as Iceland's Consul General in Thorshavn in the Faroe Islands.

Mr. Hannesson presented his credentials to President George W. Bush on January 8, 2009, and was present at the inauguration of the 44th President of the United States, Barack H. Obama, on January 20, 2009. Prior to his assignment in Washington D.C., Mr. Hannesson was the Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations, New York, for five years.

Mr. Hannesson is married to Mrs. Anna Birgis. They have three children and four grandchildren.

Trade and Investment Forum Agreement signed with the US

Iceland and the United States signed on January 15, 2009, an agreement on "Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum". The agreement will provide a forum for expanding and strengthening bilateral trade and investment relations between Iceland and the United States.

The two-way goods trade between Iceland and the United States was \$835 million in 2007. Exports from Iceland to the United States totaled \$205 million, mainly fish and fish products. Iceland's import from the United States totaled \$630, including aircraft, inorganic chemicals, vehicles and machinery.

Honorary Consuls

It is with sadness that the Embassy announces that two of Iceland's Honorary Consuls in the United States passed away last year. They are Mr. Ólafur Arni Ásgeirsson, Honorary Consul in Houston, Texas, and Mr. Maurice K. Horowitz, Honorary Consul General in Atlanta, Georgia. The Embassy is grateful for their invaluable long service and sends its condolences to their families.

Thorablót

The Icelandic Association of Washington, D.C., will celebrate its annual Thorablót at the American Legion post in Fairfax, VA, on February 21, 2009. For further information visit: <http://www.icelanddc.com/>

The Icelandic American Association of Hampton Roads, VA, will celebrate its annual Thorablót at the Ocean View V.F.W. Post in Norfolk, VA on February 7, 2009. For further information visit: <http://www.icelandicassociationvirginia.org/>

The Icelandic Society of New York will celebrate its Thorablót at the Landmark on the Park on February 28, 2009. For further information contact Ms. Bergþóra Laxdal at: blax@mfa.is