

**Address by Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of
Iceland, on the presentation of the Halldór Laxness Literary
Prize Held at Veröld – house of Vigdís, Thursday 19
September 2019, 11:30 am.**

Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, President of Iceland, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir,
Former President of Iceland, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Prime Minister of
Iceland; Ian McEwan; ladies and gentlemen.

It is my honour and pleasure to welcome you all to this event marking
the presentation of the Halldór Laxness International Literary Prize for
the very first time.

It is particularly fitting that this event is held here in Veröld, the House
of Vigdís, which is the newest building at the University of Iceland -
named after Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former President of Iceland and
the first democratically elected female head of state in the world. This
building houses humanities at the University of Iceland – in particular
languages and world cultures. Languages have always been a
particular passion of Vigdís, because "languages open windows onto
the world", as she phrased it herself.

Literature has long occupied a major position in the work that takes place at the University of Iceland. Teaching and research in literature both ancient and modern, creative writing, translation studies and related subjects flourish here at the University. It is also true that authors and poets are very well represented among those who have been awarded honorary doctoral degrees from the University of Iceland – a very distinguished group, including the man after which the prize awarded here today is named: The Nobel Laureate, Halldór Laxness.

Ladies and gentlemen. It is well known that ever since the first settlers arrived in Iceland, literature has played an integral part in the history, culture and language of the Icelandic nation. But no culture can survive on ancient glory alone. Rather, its lifeblood depends on the ability of each generation to renew the stories and the heritage in a dialogue with the world. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir and Halldór Laxness have most certainly been such forces of renewal for Icelandic culture. And it is therefore also fitting that the prize to be awarded today goes to an internationally renowned author who has contributed to the renewal of the art of storytelling through his work.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to welcome now to the podium, the Prime Minister of Iceland, Katrin Jakobsdottir.