

**Address by Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of Iceland, at the opening of the international conference States of Exception and the Politics of Anger. Held in the Conference Hall of the National Museum Of Iceland on 19 October 2018, 9:15 a.m.**

Ladies and gentlemen, Good morning to you all.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the University of Iceland and to open this international conference—sponsored by the EDDA Research Center—on emergency politics entitled States of Exception and the Politics of Anger. For the next two days, over twenty speakers—from various disciplines—will discuss cutting-edge scholarship on topics, ranging from financial crises, the populist surge, the rise of authoritarian and anti-liberal movements, and technological and surveillance challenges.

In light of recent global political developments, this is an important and timely conference. Governments resort with increasing frequency to emergency powers or other extraordinary measures to deal with problems such as economic instability, political and social unrest, and terrorism. The conference addresses issues raised by this development from historical and contemporary perspectives and in different geographies. It is here where history can arguably serve as a lesson for democracy and where the timing of the “injunction of

memory” matters—or the moments when people are “prepared” to deal with the past as an integral part of the present.

The conference seeks to offer explanations and answers that have a direct bearing on this as a way of interpreting and understanding current political practices, their roots and genealogies. A few questions arise in this context: What explains the use of emergency institutions and legislation to grapple with political, economic and social problems? What are the connections between the state of exception and populist and authoritarian politics? What is the potential of the rule of law to respond to emergencies and societal disruptions? Is it possible to identify alternative paradigms or frameworks for confronting severe crises or systemic flaws?

The contemporary challenges facing democracy also create an important responsibility for universities. Universities are the best possible forums for discussions on politics, public administration, and constitutional issues to give the discourse greater depth and clarity. Hence, the need to prevent current pressures on democracy from overwhelming the university and from yielding to intolerance and anti-pluralist sentiments. This fact alone should spur us to rethink and analyze the reasons for democracy’s current problems and to seek remedies that can respond to present and emerging threats. To the foreign visitors, is critical to understand questions, such as the links between emergency politics, constitutional powers, and

authoritarian developments, to help ensure that democracy remains vibrant, viable and relevant, not just for the present but also for the future.

I wish you all the best for the exciting program ahead. I hope that you will experience an enjoyable stay in Iceland, scientifically, culturally and socially, and that you will return home, not only with fond memories, but also a better understanding of some of the most pressing political problems we face today.

Thank you.