**Address of Ambassador Guðni Bragason at an Oorja Foundation tree planting ceremony on 8ths September 2021.**

Excellencies, Madam Minister of State, chairman of the Indo-Icelandic Business Association, ladies and gentlemen.

It is with great pleasure that I attend this event on behalf of my country, Iceland, as an Ambassador designate. I like to thank the Oorja Foundation for inviting me, as well as the co-host, the Indo-Icelandic Business Association.

It is a special pleasure to meet the founder of the Oorja Foundation, former Minister of State for Higher Education, Madam Deepti Rawat Bhardwaj, the National General Secretary of the BJP Mahila Morcha) and the former Chief Minister of uttarakhand, Mr Trivendra Singh Rawat. the former Chief Minister of Uttarakhand.

Planting a tree has also a special meaning for us. My country with its harsh and cold climate suffered throughout the centuries from over-grazing, soil erosion, desertification, as well as volcanic eruptions covering the land with ash and lava.

These conditions led to the establishment of the first state Soil Conservation Service in Europe more that a century ago, in 1907. A year later the Icelandic Forest Service was established. The efforts of these services and the work of thousands of volunteers have let to a massive land restoration in our country.

We have also offered training to other peoples in this respect. Today one of the pillars of the Icelandic development cooperation is a Land Restoration Training Programme under the auspieces of UNESCO.

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

In this context I also would like to mention the important role women have played in drawing attention to this important issue.

The former President of Iceland, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, used her considerable influence to encourage people to plant trees. Madam Vigdís was the in 1980 the first woman to be elected Head of State in democratic elections. Allow me to recall, that as a young diplomat that President Vigdís included in all state visits a tree planting event, similar to what we are doing here today. The election of Madam Vigdís in 1980 also set the tone for a more active role of women in Icelandic politics.

For us today planting trees is a way of living, going hand in hand with our efforts to promote sustainabilty, the sustainable utilization of natural resources, such as forests, and fight the negative effects of global warming. As trees grow they help halting climate change by removing carbon dioxide from the air, storing carbon in the trees and soil, and releasing oxygen into the air.

Finally, thank you very much for inviting me to participate in this event. It is good to know that here, in the warm and beautiful Nehru Park, a tree will grow bearing the name of Iceland.

**Thank you.**