

## Røða hjá Sirið Stenberg, landsstýriskvinnu í almanna- og mentamálum, í sambandi við flaggdagshaldið í Reykjavík 25.04.2024

Góðu færoyingar, íslendingar, gestir og góðu tit øll.

Av hjarta takk fyri heiðurin at bera okkara kæra Merki eina heiðurskvøðu á flaggdegnum og av hjarta takk fyri høvið at vera saman við mínum landsmonnum og tykkum øllum vinsælu fólki á hesum fagra fyrsta summerdegi á hesum vakra stað.

Eg fari at gera tað soleiðis, at ein partur av røðuni verður á færoyskum, og so havi eg ein part á enskum. Eg skifti ímillum málini nakrar ferðir.

Dear Faroe islanders, Icelanders, guests and dear all,

A heartfelt thank you for the honour of saying some words in honour of our beloved flag, Merkið, on this Flag Day. Also, a heartfelt thank you for the opportunity to be here with my fellow countrymen and all you hospitable people on this great first summerday in this beautiful place.

This speech will be delivered partly in Faroese and partly in English. I will alternate between the languages a few times.

"At bera tað Merkið, sum eyðkennir verkið"

Henda regla úr okkara tjóðsangi stóð á tryggjunum hjá okkara manslandsliði í handbólti, tá ið teir spældu søguligu dystirnar í Berlin, og øll tjóðin var í sonnum handbóltsrúsi.

The handball matches of our men's national team have been engraved in our memory; particularly, when 5,000 Faroe islanders sang our National Anthem in Berlin. The moment when we all joined together as one and sang from the bottom of our hearts with pride of the achievement of our national handball team and their representation of us as a people and nation with thousands of Faroese flags fluttering in the sports arena. It was a magical and memorable moment.

Handbólturin trein út í heim, á altjóða vøllin, við Merkinum. Teir umboðaðu ikki bert seg sjálvar, men okkum øll sum færoyingar og sum tjóð. Og á jøvnum føti við onnur fólk og aðrar tjóðir.

Seeing our dear Merki flutter among the other flags of the world confirms our existence as a people. It also recognises our self-determination. It grants us respect as well as self-respect – and not least equal status as a nation.

The Faroese have also closely followed Icelandic handball. We have cheered you on and acquired the well-known Icelandic cheer 'HU!'

A few days ago, the Faroese women's national handball team played against Iceland. You beat us, but on a historic note, our women's national team qualified for the European championship finals, and the news broke while they were still on the pitch in Iceland.

How special, that the news broke while in Iceland. As a sign of fellowship. Soon, our women are also headed out into the world with our flag, Merkið, to represent us all.

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The lengthy process of acquiring our own Faroese flag has required strenuous work.

Young Faroese students in Copenhagen, lead by Jens Olivur Lisberg, Thomas Pauli Dahl and Janus Øssurson, created the first Faroese flag; a table flag sewed by Ninna Jacobsen. Later, they made the flag that now hangs in the church in Fámjin and which initially fluttered in Faroese winds on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1919.

The years from 1919 onwards were stormy, symbolically, and the struggles were rough. That is an important but separate story.

The need for a Faroese national flag grew among the Faroese, but the break trough was at the start of WWII (World War Two). As strange as it may sound, it required a World War.

When Denmark was occupied by Germany on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1940, the connection between Denmark and the Faroes was severed, and few days later, the Faroes were occupied by the British. Brits did not appreciate Faroese ships sailing under the Danish flag, now that Denmark was occupied by Germany, which was considered an enemy of Britain. As a solution, Faroese ships started sailing under the Faroese flag.

During the War, the Faroese flag was therefore used as a maritime flag; however, Merkið was not used in Parliament. It was not until 1948 that Merkið was legalised as the flag of the Faroe Islands.

We might say that the Second World War played a part in gaining Merkið. However, the War also took from us as wars always do. The Faroe Islands lost many ships, and many lives were lost at sea.

Icelandic seas have also claimed the lives of Faroese fishermen.

This marks another connection between the countries. The sea has gathering abilities as well as dividing abilities. Those who have passed away are part of us and our shared history. We honour their memory.

It was said about Jens Olivur Lisberg that:

” The tall, blond, well-built young man, quiet, friendly and witty was the essence of student life, the inspirational and inciting. Are the Faroese ever to reach a point of standing united and rowing in the same direction, that boat needs a flag.” He said

The message in these words about being united and rowing in the same direction remains essential also today. Concord moves us forward. Discord separates and dismantles. World history as well as our own history demonstrates this point. That is why we must stand together as countries and support the democratic values that our neighbouring nations are built on.

Tíverri doyði Jens Olivur Lisberg ungur, bert 23 ára gamal í 1920. At hugsa sær til, hvat hann í sínum stutta lívi hevur avrikað.

Tað er ikki mongdin av árunum, sum sigur nakað um lívsavrikið, men avrikini í sær sjálvum, og tey hjá Jens Olivur Lisberg tala fyri seg. Tey eru okkara søga, okkara samleiki, okkara stoltleiki og ímyndin av savningarmegini og sálini í samfelagnum.

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Tað er altíð meira, sum savnar okkum, enn sum skilir. Hóast Merkið kann hava ymiskan týðning fyri okkum, so er Merkið okkara savningarflagg. Vit eiga tað øll og eru øll góð við tað.

Merkið rørir djúpar kenstur í fólki. Vit hava tað við okkum úr vøggju í grøv. Vit vísa gleði við Merkinum, og vit vísa á okkara sorg við Merkinum. Tá ið flaggað verður í hálvari stong, verða vit stúrin og syrgin. Krossurin í flagginum ímyndar eina kristna tjóð og kann geva teimum syrgjandi og okkum øllum vón um tryggja framtíð.

Vit kenna eisini øll, hvussu glað vit verða, tá ið vit til dømis hava vunnið, og Merkið veittrar. Ella tá ið vit uttanlands kunnu síggja føroyska flaggið veittra millum hini fløggini, ja, tá kenna vit okkum virðismett sum eitt fólk.

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It is said that the value of anything can be measured by what it took to accomplish. The struggle for our flag was tough, but the harder the battle, the sweeter the victory.

Now, we might ask the question, whether Merkið would be our national flag, had it not been for the War. Yes, I am entirely certain that it would, as our history shows. Any movement, founded on ardent ideals and progress for people and country, is unstoppable. It will conquer in the end.

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The history of the Icelandic flag is also special and powerful.

Part of the battle for Icelandic independence was the battle for their own flag. As every battle for independence is.

Many plans and suggestions for the appearance of the flag were suggested. Einar Skáld Benadiktson suggested a flag with white bunting and a blue cross in 1897. Many applauded the flag, but the King would not allow it. I saw that flag yesterday as I was on an interesting and inspirational visit at your National Museum.

Matthías Tórðarson suggested a flag in 1906 with blue bunting, a white cross and a red cross within the white cross. The colours were to signify *fjallabláman, Ísinn og eldinn*.

In 1914 Sigurður Eggerz – Icelandic Minister – asked the king to approve Matthías Tórðarson's suggestion and to confirm an Icelandic constitution. The King denied both requests and Sigurður Eggerz withdrew.

In 1915 Icelanders were allowed to use the Icelandic flag for celebration but not as a national flag. The condition was that Dannebrog must be raised alongside the parliament, and therefore two flagpoles were erected. In 1918 when Iceland gained full independence, a new flagpole was erected at the Government Building while the other two carried no flags. The symbolism was crystal clear.

Sigurður Eggerz was acting Prime Minister just then. He delivered a famous speech saying:

*“Og í gær hefur konungurinn gefið út úrskurð um þjóðfána Íslands, sem blaktir frá því í dag yfir hinu íslenska ríki... Fáninn er tákn fullveldis vors. Fáninn er ímynd þeirra hugsjóna, sem þjóð vor á fegurstar, hvert stórverk, sem unnið er af oss, eykur veg fánans, hvort sem það er unnið á höfunum, í baráttunni við brim og úfnar öldur eða á svæði framkvæmdanna eða í vísindum og fögrum listum. Því göfugri sem þjóð vor er, þess göfugri verður fáni vor. Vegur hans og frami er frægð þjóðar vorrar... Vér biðjum alföður að styrkja oss til að lyfta fánanum til frægðar og frama...”*

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Looking at the historic timelines of the Faroese and Icelandic flag stories, there is no doubt that the Faroese islanders have been inspired nationally by Icelanders. Iceland was recognised as a sovereign state in 1918 and in 1919, Merkið fluttered in Fámjin in the Faroe Islands. Both flags fluttered for years before they were publically acknowledged. Our flags are even made using the same beautiful colours just like our origins are the same. Even today, there are many of us who admire and look up to what Iceland has accomplished and still accomplishes.

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For thousands of years, people have gathered under various flags. We share this desire today, as most self-respecting clubs and communities have a flag, logo or uniform. People also regularly share photos on social media of national, recreational or political flags to show where their support lies – or not.

We seem to be genetically inclined towards demonstrating who we are and what we stand for. We often express ourselves using symbols. A flag is the strongest symbol.

How can it be that in the present day with countless choices for all that we still celebrate the Flag Day? It might be an indication that in a world where nearly anything is possible, and development races past us and on the other side wars still are affecting many people and countries, well, maybe people stop and look back to fellowship and traditions. To what is safe and known. To history and roots. Merkið represents values, traditions, history and identity which are all necessary tools for going into our future, so that we don't lose touch with our roots as well as ourselves.

Flags are also a representation of what we fight for.

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The Faroe Islands and Iceland have much in common. There are strong ties connecting us and we consider you our closest relatives – like siblings. In many areas, we look up to you, your courage and your vision. You are inspiring, inclusive and free. We always feel good around you. We feel respected.

Gjøgnum nógv ár hevur tætt samband verið millum Føroyar og Ísland.

Nógvir føroyingar leitaðu sær til Íslands at arbeiða í 1950-60unum. Teirra millum vóru míni verforeldur, sum arbeiddu her í eini tvey ár. Ta tíðina tosaðu tey altíð so gleðiliga um. Tey høvdu familju her yviri og hava tað enn. So familjubond eru eisini millum londini. Og enn leita føroyingar sær til Íslands í útbúgvingarørindum o.ø.

Sambandið millum londini er sterkt, og nógvir føroyingar hava eisini Ísland sum sítt heim. Tykkum sendi eg eina serliga heilsu á flaggdegnum og gleðist um at hitta nøkur tykkara og at vita, at tit hava funnið tykkum eydnuna her.

Tit eru dømi um, at tað ber væl til at hava tvey heimland. Føroyar er ikki bara eitt avmarkað geografiskt øki, tí tað at vera føroyingur er eisini ein samleiki og nakað, vit bera við okkum í hjørtunum. Tað er okkara felags upphav og felags grundvøllur. Á tann hátt er føroyski samleikin uttan landamørk og heldur ein savnan av fólki við føroyska tjóðskapinum í hjartanum.

Føroyingar hava nógv í felag, og nakað av tí týðningarmesta er føroyska málið. Tí liggur tað mær á hjarta í dag eisini at røða á føroyskum. Tí móðurmálinum eiga tit altíð lut í, eisini um tit ikki búa í Føroyum.

Ein dagin herfyri las eg eina so sigandi yrking um týðningin av móðurmálinum. Urd Johannesen sigur tað soleiðis:

Sjálvmál!

um tú vil bróta meg,

rangsnara mína søgu,

brenn mínar ognir,

doyv mínar sansir,

ógilda míni heitir,

fjal mítt útsýni,

fongsla mínar føtur,

sløkk mína rødd,

niðra mína sjálvsmynd

- tak bara alt, eg eigi,

men tak ei móðurmálið frá mær,-

tí har býr alt, sum er eg,  
orð, sum eingin annar eigur,  
týdningar, sum bara vit skilja,  
virði, sum fáa okkum at vakna,  
frælsi, sum onnur hava mist,  
framtíðin, altíð við ð

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We are pleased to have an embassy in Iceland. There are many opportunities for developing collaborations for the benefit of both nations. Fellowship in many areas. Cultural possibilities, in particular, have plenty of potential, both in terms of working together and learning from each other. This could include areas of art, music, language, acting, literature and culture in its broadest sense.

We are fortunate that more and more Icelandic literature is translated into Faroese language, and we have books analysing Faroese and Icelandic artists. Choirs from both countries have a long history of working together and visiting each other, and many of our most talented musicians have worked or studied in Iceland. The same is in sports.

Our beautiful common Nordic House in the Faroes is also a window for Faroe islanders into Icelandic arts and culture. The Faroese film industry is leaping forward, and yet again we can learn from each other's experience. Our own imagination seems to be the only limit to what we can achieve together besides fisheries and business. You are also true inspiration in terms of gender equality.

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Nothing comes easily, as the history of both our flags has proven. On this day, we remember with gratitude those who have fought for our Merki. On this day, we remind ourselves that we are responsible for the future. We must embrace that responsibility and safe guard the flutter of our flag for democracy, freedom, peace and equality and to gather around the values of our flag, Merkið. And still, we must keep on fighting for the rights of Merkið to flutter freely around all the world.

Only then, we will carry the brand that characterises our labour.

Happy Flag Day, everyone, and thank you for listening.

“Tá bera vit tað Merkið, sum eyðkennir verkið”

Góðan flaggdag øll somul og takk fyri, at tit lýddu á.

**Sirið Stenberg, landsstýriskvinna í almanna- og mentamálum**