

Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting

Kiruna May 15, 2013

Statement by Iceland

Distinguished ministers and other members of the Arctic Council family. It is a great privilege to have the opportunity to visit Kiruna and experience the Swedish Arctic first hand. I would like to thank our host, Foreign Minister Bildt, and his chairmanship team for their hospitality and their leadership during these two successful years that lie behind us.

Mr. Chairman,

As we embark upon the second round of chairmanships it is appropriate to celebrate our achievements so far.

The Arctic Council has helped us build trust and understanding among the Arctic States and Arctic peoples.

This trust is based on the simple fact, supported by science and practical experience, that the interests of our nations and welfare of our citizens are interconnected in the Arctic. We are bound to work together to ensuring that the sustainable development of our region brings prosperity while respecting the unique ecological and social elements of the Arctic.

Also, our firm commitment to international law, most importantly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, continues to be the fundamental ingredient for our cooperation.

The Arctic Council has gradually taken on a more affirmative role in addressing the many challenges brought about by rapid climate and environmental change and also in pursuing economic opportunities . Under the auspices of the Council we have developed legally binding

agreements, taken on more policy relevant research and are today establishing a permanent secretariat to strengthen the institutional foundation and outreach for our work.

Today, we have been presented with several key deliverables that only represent the top of the iceberg of the extensive work done by the Council's working groups and task forces. We thank all those participating in this important work for their commitment and contribution.

Mr. Chairman,

The oil spill agreement is particularly welcomed by Iceland as we believe the Council should have an active role in safeguarding environmental and civil security in the Arctic.

To facilitate a dialogue on those issues the Government of Iceland is planning a conference in 2014 to explore how deficiencies in response and security infrastructure can be addressed in a cost efficient and effective manner by Arctic stakeholders.

The Arctic Council is making real progress on the response issue, with the search and rescue agreement and the new oil spill agreement. We should continue and build on this work.

The Arctic Infrastructure Project is an important first step in getting a circumpolar overview of relevant aviation and maritime infrastructure that is essential for both economic development and safety.

I'm pleased to note that we will be stepping up the Council's efforts on the prevention side with the new task force on oil pollution prevention and by engaging in discussions with industry and business on best practices.

We also welcome intensified dialogue between the Council and the Arctic business community and look forward to taking active part in

shaping that process through the Arctic Business Forum during the Canadian chairmanship.

Climate change is the single most important driving force behind change in the Arctic. The assessments presented here today, such as the reports on Biodiversity and Ocean Acidification, underline the urgency of taking concrete actions to address climate change - and the Arctic states must demonstrate international leadership to that end.

Mr. Chairman,

Climate change, shipping and economic activities in the North are all issues that have transregional significance and call for a more active engagement with non-Arctic stakeholders, be it states, organizations or businesses. Iceland firmly believes that meeting the interest of relevant stakeholders to contribute to the work of the Council will strengthen our ability to ensure the sustainable development of the North.

Let me conclude by thanking Sweden again for your hard work during the last two years and by wishing our good friends and neighbors to the West, Canada, all the best during their chairmanship.

Thank you.