

# **Entry by Connie Hedegaard, Danish Minister for the Environment, in the Arctic Council, Salekhard, October 25th, 2006.**

**Mr. Chairman,**

## **The role of the Arctic Council**

**Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands had high hopes for the Arctic Council when it was created 10 years ago. The Council has developed into a forum for focused and constructive dialogue between the Arctic nations and its peoples, and the Arctic is no longer considered a remote place on Earth.**

**It is of critical importance that the Arctic Council continues to address the many issues faced by the Arctic communities and produce tangible progress towards sustainable development in their fragile environments.**

## **Climate Change**

**Many changes in the Arctic have global significance.**

**Standing on the edge of the World's most productive glacier – the view over the Ilulissat Ice-fjord in Greenland is simply breathtaking! Icebergs the size of skyscrapers are launched from the calving glacier at an unprecedented rate. But - in less than 5 years, - the glacier front has retreated nearly 10 miles. This year in August, one of the World's leading glaciologists, Professor Dorthe Dahl-Jensen from the University of Copenhagen, voiced her deep concern: "As scientists, we are shocked by this development," she told Senator John McCain and a group of senators from the US, who were invited by the Greenland Home Rule and the Danish**

**Government to visit this spectacular place and witness the effect of global warming for themselves.**

**An Inuit saying goes: “If you hide a ghost, it will continue to grow”. It is our responsibility to make sure that the international community is made aware of the effects of climate change in the Arctic. And it is our responsibility to act decisively on that knowledge.**

**The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment and more recent evidence tell us a story of escalating melting of the Greenland ice cap; and NASA reports of a 16% shrinking of the ice-cover of the Polar Sea. Climate change seems to be happening much faster than was anticipated by the experts just a few years ago.**

**To NOT act upon this knowledge is not an option, and the Arctic Council must continue to address all the aspects of global warming – its regional consequences as well as its global impacts.**

**What we - as Arctic nations - can do to enhance global climate policies and mitigate global warming, and what we can do and should do in the Arctic to allow the Arctic Peoples to adapt to its inevitable consequences should all be addressed in this forum. Concrete policy responses are urgently needed, - in the international negotiations as well as in our own countries. We should use the Arctic Council to exchange experience and to help each other in finding a way forward.**

**Our countries are responsible for a large part of the global emissions of greenhouse gases and we have a special responsibility to respond to the findings of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment and all of the other evidence on the consequences of man-made climate change.**

**Greenland is already striving to cope with the effects of climate change and we know for a fact that we have only**

seen the very early signs of global warming. We need effective policy responses and we need them now.

## **Pollution of the Arctic Environment**

**Persistent toxic substances are a serious threat to the health and well-being of Arctic people. The pollutants are accumulating in the food chain and they end up in fish, birds and mammals; - important sources of food in the Arctic communities. Studies from the Faroe Islands have shown alarming negative effects of mercury in pregnant women on the neural development of unborn children, with measurable effects on their mental development after birth.**

**Arctic citizens can hardly defend themselves from pollution coming from thousands of miles away, - of course. We need concerted, global action – such as the Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants - to deal with issues of this kind.**

**The burning of coal is one of the major sources of mercury emissions - globally as well as in the Arctic. Rapid economic development in the Far East and corresponding rise in the use of energy – based on coal to a large degree - makes it imperative to create a global, legally binding instrument on mercury, and I would very much like to see the Arctic Council make its voice heard on that issue.**

## **Continued monitoring**

**The finding of DDT in the breast milk of mothers in the Arctic and problems of reproduction in Polar bears and damages to their liver, kidneys, bones and immune-system have helped in making the case that POPs are truly global problems.**

**Such findings demonstrate the need to continue the monitoring of contamination in the Arctic and its consequences in order to promote responsible chemicals management throughout the World.**

## **Sustainable Development**

**The Kingdom of Denmark is keenly aware of the social issues confronting the Arctic.**

**The “Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic” - initiated by the Arctic Council and lead by Greenland – has given us valuable insight in how we can enhance the social, cultural and economic conditions in the Arctic. I very much hope that the partnerships between indigenous peoples and experts that have been established in this project can be continued and provide us with knowledge and ideas for the future.**

## **Biodiversity**

It is evident that Arctic wildlife and the protection of biodiversity have my attention.

The sustainable use of living resources is a precondition for the Greenland and Faroe societies, and as many of the animals of the Arctic are migratory the protection of biodiversity in the Arctic has global implications.

This underlines the importance of the work of the CAFF working group, and we look forward to chairing this group.

**Mr. Chairman,**

**The Arctic Region faces many challenges. Sustainable development to the benefit of its inhabitants is the core issue. The environmental problems brought about by the global community have to be dealt with. We need to keep all of this in focus in the Arctic Council.**

**Thank you to our Russian chairmanship for a job well done over the past two years, and for your commitment to the task. Also I would like to thank for the hospitality with which we have been welcomed to Salekhard.**

**Thank you also to the working groups of the Council for their dedication, enthusiasm and hard work.**

**Looking ahead, it is my firm belief that the Council has an important role to play in promoting co-operation and sustainable development in the Arctic. Therefore, we must continue to bring all the knowledge we have and the lessons we have learned to the attention of the peoples of the Arctic as well as the rest of the world.**

**Thank you for your attention.**