

Ministers,

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a great privilege to be in Tromsø today and to formally accept the torch from Norway of the Arctic Council chairmanship. Norway has led the Council through a period of great changes in the Arctic and has done so with forward looking thinking and energy. The Kingdom of Denmark - Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands - will approach the task with the same vigor and devotion. We remain committed to dealing with the enormous challenges facing the Arctic region today. Some of these challenges were discussed in Ilulissat in May last year. However, the task of carrying the issues forward and developing common solutions lies to a large extent with the Arctic Council. Allow me to outline our ideas for the work in the Arctic Council for the next two years.

A primary objective of our chairmanship is to secure a strong platform for the Arctic Council. In the present dynamics of a changing Arctic we must safeguard continued sustainable development in this region. A forward looking approach in the Arctic will have to rest upon the political framework of the Arctic Council.

Not least as a result of climate change the world's attention is directed to the Arctic region, and the possibilities it presents. In this new setting it will be of major importance for the Arctic Council to safeguard the inherent cultural, economic and political rights of the peoples and the Nations in the Arctic. The human dimension remains at the core of Arctic Council work. Developments in the Arctic – for good or for bad – directly influence life and living conditions for the Arctic populations. During our chairmanship we will continue to work together to develop tools for a better future for the peoples of the Arctic. Human health will be a priority issue in this respect.

The international polar year has produced major and important results. During our chairmanship we will continue work to secure the legacy of the international Polar Year for the benefit of science and thereby for the arctic residents.

Statements at yesterday's meeting, presided over by minister Støre and Vice-President Gore, once again clearly demonstrated that climate change is a global challenge with severe regional impacts. In the Arctic we already suffer disproportionately the consequences of climate change and we must adapt to the

changes. Thus, climate change presents itself as the present overarching issue for work within the Arctic Council for the years to come. Looking towards COP15 and beyond, Denmark will carry the climate change agenda forward not least in terms of the Arctic challenge.

Scientific results again and again demonstrate that Arctic Climate change is happening faster than we thought yesterday. As Arctic nations, we have a common responsibility to make sure that the international community is made aware of the effects of climate change in the Arctic. And we are determined to act decisively on the evidence at hand. NOT to act upon this knowledge is not an option. Therefore the Arctic Council must continue to address all the aspects of global warming – its regional consequences as well as its global impacts.

Adaptation to climate change is a core issue for this forum. But we should also use the Arctic Council to discuss what we as Arctic nations can do to enhance global climate policies and mitigate global warming. Concrete policy responses are urgently needed in the international negotiations as well as in our own countries. We are well placed within the Arctic Council to exchange experience and to help each other finding a way forward.

The Arctic states are responsible for a large share of the global emissions of greenhouse gases. We have a special responsibility to respond to the findings of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment and other reports on man-made climate change. The Arctic is already striving to cope with the effects of climate change and we know for a fact that we have only seen the early signs of global warming. We need effective policy responses and we need them now.

Climate changes and the increase in activities in the Arctic have resulted in new challenges to the Arctic biodiversity and the sustainable use of the Arctic's living resources. During our chairmanship we will continue to support cooperation on these matters. By recognizing that the United Nations have declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity, the Arctic Council becomes an important player in helping to increase awareness on all levels of the importance of Arctic biodiversity. Working groups are actively contributing to these efforts making extensive use of traditional indigenous knowledge.

Exploitation of renewable and non-renewable resources is crucial to the development of the Arctic. This development must however take place on a sustainable basis. The results produced by Arctic Council Working groups will help secure the standards and guidelines necessary in this respect.

Increased access to the Arctic waters poses challenges and opportunities. We will seek to support co-operation in relation to search and rescue just to mention one thing. Another matter to explore might be guidelines in fields such as tourism. Finally we will have to stimulate the work in the International Maritime Organization on the issue of mandatory guidelines for shipping in Arctic waters.

Also, allow me to touch upon the role of observers in the Arctic Council. Denmark welcomes the input from observers in Council work, and sees great potential for observer participation and contribution not least in the working groups. We are confident that this is a common view. As the challenges in the Arctic mount, so does the need for more in-depth analysis and reporting on Arctic developments. We will facilitate discussions between Arctic Council member states on the role of observers, and will strive to find a solution acceptable to all.

We look forward to a productive chairmanship with your kind assistance in furthering the common goals. To do the hard work I have appointed Ambassador Lars Møller as chair of the Senior Arctic Officials.

Let my final words be a thank to Norway and the Norwegian minister for foreign affairs, his able chairman of the Senior Arctic Officials, Ambassador Klepsvik, all the hardworking chairs of the Working groups and all those people having worked so hard to make this meeting a success.

Thank you for your attention.