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2009-04-29

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Ministry for Foreign Affairs

**Remarks by the Minister for Foreign Affairs
of Sweden, Carl Bildt, at the 6th Session
of the Arctic Council in Tromsø on 29 April
2009**

Mr. Chairman,

(Appreciate to be back in Tromsø. Thank you for Norwegian hospitality at the dinner last night.)

Mr. Chairman,

Developments in the Arctic have the potential to feed back into global climate change by passing tipping points in the Earth's climate system. That may drastically alter the path of climate change into what could be a disastrous and irreversible run away process. The fact that the Arctic seems to warm at a rate three times the global rate is a signal that has to be taken seriously.

The eyes of the world are set on Copenhagen in December 2009. Sweden will be president of the European Union during COP15. That meeting must succeed in agreeing on measures to prevent climate change from exceeding a global warming of two degrees. All Arctic states share a responsibility to contribute to that result. But we can do more.

The Arctic states should also implement measures that can temporarily slow down Arctic warming. Sweden welcomes

the new Arctic Council Task Force on short-lived climate forcers.

Mr. Chairman,

The eight Arctic states have a special responsibility in the Arctic. It is our duty to act responsibly and maintain peace and stability in this region. We need to pursue policies that ensure sustainable development and protect the environment on land, at sea and in the air.

The Arctic Council is a well established forum for dialogue and coordination. It is gaining increased importance as Arctic issues become more prominent on the agendas of other bodies and are extensively discussed in wide circles. A more accessible Arctic demands leadership from the Arctic Council. That requires improvements in its effectiveness. A key issue is the ability of the Council to follow up on the recommendations and guidelines it adopts.

Many look to the Arctic Council for leadership. Sweden agrees that we should strengthen the political dimension of the Arctic Council.

Mr. Chairman,

Sweden is pleased that China, Italy, Korea and the European Commission have applied for observer status in the Council. I understand that Japan is also preparing an application. Sweden welcomes additional observer states in the Arctic Council.

We also appreciate the increasing interest of the European Commission in Arctic issues. Representing an EU member state, I know from experience that this is long overdue. We need the Commission to be on the same wavelength as the three Arctic EU member states. That would facilitate internal EU deliberations. Many EU policies impact on the Arctic, for example the EU policies on climate change, on chemicals and on fisheries.

At the same time, Sweden fully understands that some of the other Arctic states view these developments with a certain scepticism. The European institutions have not always demonstrated the necessary understanding of Arctic conditions and concerns that we all believe is a prerequisite for informed decision-making on Arctic issues. However, Sweden is convinced that participation by the Commission and the European Environmental Agency in the Arctic Council work would lead to substantial improvements in that respect.

Mr. Chairman,

At this meeting, we have before us a substantive report on shipping in the Arctic. The AMSA report contains negotiated recommendations on action to enhance Arctic marine safety, to protect Arctic people and environment and to build Arctic marine infrastructure.

On the basis of that preparatory work, we should now move forward together on many of those recommendations in the International Maritime Organization, the IMO.

A crucial factor for shipping in Arctic waters, ice conditions aside, is search and rescue capacity. As long as such capabilities are scarce, insurance costs will be high and shipping companies will be reluctant to risk their vessels, crews and cargo.

There are a limited number of icebreakers operating in the Arctic region, most of which are Russian. Other Arctic rim states have a very limited ice-breaking capacity. On the other hand, non-rim Arctic states, like Sweden, operate in the Arctic Ocean on a regular basis, together with non-Arctic states like Germany. However, given the vast Arctic Ocean area, this is not enough.

Sweden therefore welcomes the decision to set up a Task Force to prepare a Memorandum of Understanding on Search and Rescue in the Arctic. We are ready to participate and contribute our expertise and experience from similar

types of cooperation in the Baltic Sea, the Barents Region and other relevant contexts.

The AMSA report also highlights the emissions of NO_x, SO_x, black carbon and ozone. We need to curb the environmental and climate effects of those substances. That would be in line with the priority that Norway has put on reducing shipping emissions. Sweden looks forward to proposals to that effect.

Mr. Chairman,

Climate change will put marine ecosystems under severe pressure. Also in the Baltic Sea region, maritime spatial planning and ecosystem-based management are high on the agenda. People use marine areas for transport, fishing, hunting, exploitation of non-renewable natural resources and recreation. Sharing experience is necessary. We can learn a lot from each other. The sea is a shared resource for all states.

Notwithstanding the economic and environmental importance of marine issues, the people in the Arctic live on land. In cities, towns and rural communities.

Economically important infrastructure such as roads, railroads, pipelines, ports, bridges and dams need to be reviewed for structural damage, especially if it is built on permafrost, which a lot of it is in many parts of the Arctic.

The Swedish government has commissioned a thorough review of the effects of climate change on our society to identify adaptation measures needed to prevent accidents or major damage due to changing weather conditions such as heavy rains, flooding or storms. That review was concluded last year. Government agencies are now studying the recommendations and implementing a range of measures. Similar work goes on in other Arctic states. Sweden believes that the Arctic Council could do a lot more to promote and facilitate exchange of experience and information on adaptation measures in our Arctic areas. Sweden also looks

forward to further Arctic Council work on eco-system based management.

Mr. Chairman,

Indigenous peoples are Permanent Participants in the Arctic Council and contribute valuable insights. The Swedish Government is reviewing its Sami policy and has established a working group on Sami issues consisting of parliamentarians from the four political parties in office. The mandate of that group is to decide on the recommendations and proposals in recent inquiries on Sami issues, that is the “Boundary Inquiry”, the “Inquiry on Sami Hunting and Fishing Rights”, the “Inquiry on ILO convention no 169” and the “Reindeer Breeding Commission”. A bill to Parliament is due in March 2010. The Sami Parliament and other Swedish Sami organizations have been and will be briefed on the substance of the bill. In that context, the government will also consider the recommendations from the UN Human Rights Committee to determine what measures need to be taken.

Mr. Chairman,

The “International Polar Year 2007-2008” mobilized polar research capacity to conduct and coordinate a range of major science programs that would not otherwise have been possible to implement. Sweden wants that kind of cooperation continue. The agencies involved have extensive experience of cooperation in polar regions. They made major new advances and forged new partnerships during the IPY. All forms of scientific cooperation deserve our continued strong support.

The long term success of the IPY will be determined by how the large amount of new data will be analysed and synthesized. Further efforts are required to identify, preserve and share the data collected during the IPY. The ongoing work on Sustaining Arctic Observing Systems, is one of the

more important legacies of the IPY - but more work is needed. Sweden continues to support the SAON process.

The networks of journalists, scientists, teachers and young scientists that were established during the IPY also deserve continued support.

Mr. Chairman,

The energy supply potential of the Arctic region brings strong environmental challenges. The Arctic Council “Oil and Gas Assessment” report contains information on prospects and risks associated with oil and gas exploitation. It provides recommendations on how to avoid irreparable damage to ecosystems and human health. One recommendation is to rigorously apply and streamline strategic environmental impact assessments to increase their relevance and usefulness for all stakeholders. Sweden would want the Arctic Council to follow-up on this and other recommendations in that report.

With a high political ambition on combating climate change comes an obligation to move towards a low-carbon economy. Oil and gas extraction in the Arctic contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. This is a dilemma that we must face. All countries need to come together and agree on binding actions and targets at COP 15.

Climate change will be in focus for many years. But we must not forget other environmental problems in the Arctic. Toxic substances are still causing health problems for humans as well as for polar bears and other animals.

The Arctic Council “Project Support Instrument” is about to become operational. It is a circumpolar funding mechanism for projects and actions on prevention, abatement and elimination of pollutants in the Arctic, and will also support the regional cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council.

The UNEP Governing Council decision to develop a legally binding instrument on mercury is of great importance. It is a landmark decision to start work on a global mercury treaty.

Good monitoring is necessary to counteract emissions of toxic substances. Sweden has unique long-term monitoring programs for various toxic substances. We intend to continue them and are pleased to see that our results are widely used.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me finish by recalling that Sweden views hunting and fishing as legitimate activities, also in the Arctic. However, exploitation of living natural resources need to be regulated on a case by case basis taking full account of scientific advice in order to preserve the species and ensure that no damage is caused to the ecosystem as a whole. We see no reason to apply a different policy in the Arctic.

The new cooperation between the Arctic Council and the Convention of Biological Diversity is a good example of how we can increase awareness of the state of Arctic biodiversity through our work on plants and animals in Arctic ecosystems. Sweden intends to pursue this as a priority issue when we will chair the Arctic Council in 2011-2013.

Until that time, however, we count on the ability of Denmark to chair this Council and to guide our work during the coming two years.

I want to thank Norway for having chaired the Arctic Council since our previous meeting in Salekhard.

Thank you for your attention!