

Ministerial Meeting in the Arctic Council, 15 May 2013, Kiruna, Sweden

Intervention by the Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Villy Søvndal

Thank you Mr. Chairman/Carl,

First, I would like to thank Sweden for hosting us up here in the High North - in the Swedish Arctic. It is truly a perfect setting for this meeting.

As everybody can see, substantial results have been achieved during Sweden's chairmanship and I would like to congratulate Carl and his crew with this - everything is now ready for Canada to continue this very good development.

The Arctic has become part of world politics. Still more decision we make have consequences for countries far away from the Arctic. It is therefore quite natural that we see China, India, South Korea and others knocking on our door.

I am convinced that we are making the right decision to welcome a number of countries as observers. We also look forward to welcoming the EU in the very near future. Surely, these new observers will give valuable contributions to the work of the Arctic Council. By this decision we show to the outside world that ensuring a sustainable future to the benefit of the people living in the Arctic is a regional and a global responsibility.

In my view, one very important achievement at this meeting is the signing of the Oil Spill agreement.

This agreement has once again shown that we are able to make concrete decisions in the Arctic Council. It could perhaps have been more ambitious, but it is a very important step in the right direction and we must not forget that sometimes perfect can be the enemy of good.

The Kingdom of Denmark will be hosting the first Oil Spill exercise this summer just as we will – again this year – organize a Search and Rescue exercise. I would like to urge you to participate and organize exercises in the coming years so we can further elaborate our oil spill preparedness.

The Arctic Strategy of the Kingdom of Denmark focuses on the people of the Arctic. We therefore welcome the working program of the incoming Canadian chairmanship for also prioritising this objective. The development in the Arctic increasingly influences the living conditions of the people of the North. Our work in the Arctic Council should reflect this and this is why we welcome the involvement of the ministers of environment who had a good meeting in February – and we will be happy to see other sectorial ministers getting involved in an Arctic Council setting.

Having the people of the Arctic as the top priority for our work also means involving people of the Arctic in the work of the Arctic Council. For us this means allowing representatives from the three governments within The Kingdom of Denmark to participate on an equal footing at our deliberations. Thus, it is important that each part of the Kingdom is allowed one seat each at the negotiation table.

It is an important point for us and also for the Arctic Council. It is not justified that the government of the Faroe Islands and of Greenland - that cover no less than 20% of the total Arctic territory – are not allowed to participate fully in all aspect of Arctic Council negotiations. I urge the Canadian chairmanship to take this very seriously and to pave the way for a satisfactory solution to this issue.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you once more for having us here in wonderful Kiruna and I will now – with your permission – pass the floor to the representative of the Faroe Islands.