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Round Table Discussion 1
Actions against Pollution and Environmental Degradation

Minister Tuomioja, Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to thank the speakers for their detailed reports. It is hard to discuss complex issues in such a short time but you have managed to provide us with a comprehensive overview of the work of the Arctic Council in these important fields.

The AMAP 2002 Assessment

I wish to congratulate AMAP on the Second Assessment Report and thank the Working Group for its groundbreaking work in monitoring and assessing pollution in the Arctic region. Good scientific data is an important prerequisite for sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic.

The Second AMAP Assessment report confirms that the Arctic is a comparatively clean area. This we must maintain and, at the same time, take note of the troublesome signs the report reveals. The levels of PCB, for example, in some areas, are high enough to cause health hazards for marine mammals, seabirds and even humans.

The Arctic and the International Arena

The Report indicates that the marine ecosystem takes most of the punishment caused by contaminants.

Iceland has been active internationally in promoting the protection of the marine ecosystem. Joint action has resulted in better conditions as can be seen in decreasing lead levels and the levels of POPs. Protection of the Arctic marine environment is extremely important. I would in particular like to welcome the strategic plan of PAME for the protection of the Arctic marine environment. I note with appreciation the growing interest in the efforts of the Arctic Council in this field. We should encourage those who wish to make progress and develop new programs of benefit to us all.

We note that although several POPs have been banned or restricted, new chemicals are emerging and have similar effect as PCB. These new chemicals are transported long distances, like PCB. Therefore, it is necessary to be alert and continue work in the international arena on controlling these chemicals. The sources of mercury, being mostly located outside the Arctic, call for close monitoring globally. The scientists have brought to our attention the impact that variations in climate can have on the transport and movement of contaminants to and within the Arctic. This makes it even more important for the Arctic to have a profile in the international arena.

A good example of this is the Stockholm Agreement, where Arctic co-operation was crucial for global attention.

Monitoring

Monitoring is one of the most important aspects of sustainable development. Regular and systematic studies make it possible to monitor the development of natural resources, be they changes in fish stocks, bird life or vegetation. Conservation as well as sustainable use need to be taken into account. In this context I would like to mention, in particular, CAFF's Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Program. The primary goal of this program is to improve our understanding of changes in circumpolar biodiversity through harmonization and expansion of current monitoring programs and the sharing of collective information. It is important to secure integration of this program with other relevant work, including ongoing monitoring work of AMAP and the ACIA project. We should continue to develop proposals for monitoring the Arctic environment and make sure that our approach is cross-disciplinary in nature.