Arctic Council Contribution

to the Impact of the Paris Agreement

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Meeting of Senior Arctic Officials,
Fairbanks, 17 March, 2016

The UN Climate Change Secretariat welcomes this opportunity to brief the Arctic Council on how the Paris Agreement aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change.

The Agreement was adopted through consensus decision on 12 December and will be opened for signatures at a high level event hosted by the UN Secretary-General in New York on 22 April. Expectations are high for the number of signatures on the opening day. I trust that all Arctic Council members and observer Governments will be among the signatories on the opening day. Our hope is to exceed the record set in 1982 when over one hundred Governments signed the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the opening day.

There is a double trigger for entry into force: 55 Parties representing at least 55% of global emissions.

The Paris Agreement is ambitious as it takes the full threat of climate change head on. It sets an upper limit on acceptable global risk from climate change at well below 2°C warming above preindustrial levels by the end of this century and establishes the aspiration to limit warming as close to 1.5°C as possible.

These are global average warming levels. It is well understood that regional warming has already exceeded this level, such as in some parts of the Arctic. Think of this a defence line set at the global level.

It goes further and recognises the scientific reality that, to achieve this, global emissions need to reach a balance with global removals in the second half of this century. Parties to the Agreement aim to reach global peaking of emissions as soon as possible and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter.

It is encouraging in this context to note that the International Energy Agency yesterday announced that global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions stayed flat in 2015 for the second year in a row while the global economy grew by 3.1%. The fact that this is due to decoupling of emissions from economic growth is illustrated by the fact that 90% of new electricity supply in 2015 came from renewable sources.

The Agreement also established a global goal to enhance adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change. Progress on this front is particularly important given the fact that physical impacts of climate change will continue to increase for decades after global emission have peaked. Only resilience can prevent the socio-economic consequences of these impacts from increasing in equal measure. This will be particularly challenging to achieve here in the Arctic making resilience building a strategic priority for Arctic cooperation and the people in the Arctic.
The bold approach taken by the Paris Agreement makes the long-term direction clear. Re-establishing the global carbon balance will out of necessity take fundamental transformation of the global economy, not fine tuning of existing systems. The good news is that this is technologically feasible and brings significant economic benefits. The task of the Paris Agreement is to also make this politically feasible.

The alternative – allowing warming to break through the defence line – involves greater risks of climate disruption than the global community was willing to accept. The risks we are already taking are high enough.

**A strong signal has been sent to investors, innovators, decision makers and the general public**

This level of courage and ambition was made possible by:

1. The growing awareness of the multiple benefits of climate action;
2. Rapidly falling cost of energy alternatives;
3. Massive mobilization of cities and subnational governments, corporate leadership, responsible investors, moral leaders and civil society.

But the hard work of achieving the objective starts now. The strategic approach taken in the Paris Agreement rests on four mutually supportive pillars:

1. Obligation on all Parties to regularly update their nationally determined contributions informed by the overall progress made.
2. Transparency on implementation through reporting and review.
3. Scaled up cooperative action and support to developing countries.

It is significant that almost all Parties to the Convention responded to the invitation to communicate their nationally determined contributions (or INDCs) in advance of the Paris Conference. As expected, the aggregate effect of these contributions falls short of what is now needed. This is exactly why there is a need for a universal climate agreement.

The priority now is to empower Governments to go further in their contributions. Most put forward the floor rather than the ceiling of their ambition. The transparency system is essential for building trust and confidence that everyone is doing their best.

Support to developing countries is central to the Agreement and Arctic Council Members have mobilised significant climate finance. This is now supplemented by complementary support through South-South cooperation.

**Cooperative action and the global stocktake are of direct relevance to the Arctic Council**

There will be a need for an unprecedented level of cooperation including regional cooperation like you are making possible. Other international agreements such as the Montreal Protocol and the Minamata Convention on Mercury will also make significant contribution to the solution.

The first of the comprehensive global stocktakes under the Paris Agreement will be in 2023 shortly after the IPCC concludes its Sixth Assessment Report. There will be a more limited stocktake in 2018.
focusing on the aggregate effect of the mitigation contributions. These moments will create an opportunity to draw attention to Arctic assessments if they are strategically timed.

In addition to informing national Governments in shaping their contributions, the outcome of the stocktake is designed to enhance international cooperation.

Progress will not be only measured in terms of climate outcomes, however. The Paris Agreement is integral to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its seventeen SDGs. Policies with the greatest climate impact will often be driven by other objectives such as clean air. Conversely, success on restabilising the climate will determine the realm of the possible on many of the SDGs.

Let me conclude by sharing with you what I would like to see guiding the Arctic Council as it shapes its contribution to the impact of the Paris Agreement:

1. Be motivated by a strong sense of urgency combined with equally strong commitment for the longer term. There is both an urgent need for immediate results, such as through control of HFCs and other short-lived climate forcers, at the same time as long-term transformative change needs to be accelerated, such as the decarbonisation of energy supply and resilience to climate change.
2. Remain positive and pursue the immense opportunities presented by low-emission, climate resilient development pathways.
3. Promote innovation and demonstrate leadership. The climate challenge calls for the expression of the best in all of us. When you unleash the power of innovation, determination and leadership, amazing outcomes can be achieved.

I wish you all the best in your endeavours.