



**FOURTH ARCTIC COUNCIL
MINISTERIAL MEETING**

**Opening Statement by the Chairman of the Arctic Council
Mr. Davíð Oddsson
Minister for Foreign Affairs**

**24 November 2004
Nordica Hotel, Reykjavík**

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to Reykjavík on the occasion of this Fourth Meeting of the Arctic Council in Ministerial session.

Before we start, let me express my deep sadness at the death of a member of the Northern Forum delegation, Mr. Alexei Chirykalov, who lost his life in a tragic car accident in Moscow on his way to this meeting. We are informed that two more members of the delegation, Vice Governor Rayshev and Foreign Affairs Minister Sakhautdinova of Kanty-Mansysk, were seriously injured in the accident. We send our condolences to the family of the deceased and wish the Vice Governor and the Minister a full recovery.

Since the third Ministerial meeting in Inari two years ago, the Arctic Council has continued to build a solid record of achievement. We understand better our complex natural environment. We are taking steps to prevent pollution and conserve our resources. We are focusing increasingly on the well-being and the social, economic and cultural circumstances of Arctic resident. Last, but not least, our voice is being heard to more effect outside the Arctic, as we establish closer links between the region and the rest of the world.

The impressive volume of work to be presented to our meeting in the course of today bears testimony to the important role and vitality of the Arctic Council. The Arctic Human Development Report is the first comprehensive study of the living conditions of the people of the North ever produced. The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment is the first regionally based study of its kind since the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Arctic Marine Strategic Plan represents a joint effort to coordinate our response to changes affecting our all-important oceans. We are giving a boost to the use of information technology in the dispersed regions of the Arctic and broadening and intensifying research both among the scientific community and governments. Those are only some examples.

Considering the whole output of the Arctic Council, including ongoing efforts in the different Arctic Council working

groups and the various special projects being brought to fruition, be they women's involvement in fisheries management, circumpolar biodiversity monitoring or oil transfer guidelines, one is, indeed, astonished to learn how much can be achieved in the absence of a regular budget or a permanent secretariat, if only there is political will.

One of the greatest assets of this forum is the way it brings together people and groups of vastly different backgrounds; governments, indigenous peoples, parliamentarians and representatives of international organizations as well as non-governmental organizations. The unusual richness and flexibility of Arctic Council working arrangements makes the Council uniquely suited to respond to the needs of the people of the region.

We have now gathered in the Arctic's northernmost capital to review and assess, among other things, the work we have done over the past two years. As we do so, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the excellent support all of you have extended to the Icelandic Chairmanship. We have been privileged in being able to build on the outstanding work of our predecessors. If we have succeeded, it is largely on account of the unselfish contribution of people too numerous to mention by name.

But it is mainly to the future that our attention should be directed. The Arctic is an area of great opportunity, both economic and cultural. For centuries, the people of the Arctic have shown remarkable ability to adapt to change. We must, of course, recognize the environmental challenges we continue to confront. But let us also take encouragement from the resourcefulness and ingenuity of the people of the Arctic, proven through generations under often harsh and demanding natural conditions.

Confident in that hope, I am honored to declare this Fourth Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council open.