

Statement 4

Rovaniemi, 7. maí 2019

Statements from the Arctic States and from the Permanent Participants

Mr. Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson,

Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland

Thank you Mr. Chair,

Dear colleagues, heads of delegations of the Permanent Participants, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be with you here in Rovaniemi today.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate Minister Soini on the very successful completion of the Finnish chairmanship. Under Finland's leadership we have been able to truly advance our mission in the Arctic Council, in good cooperation with the Permanent Participants, the Arctic Council Working Groups and subsidiary bodies as well as an increasingly large group of Observers. We commend our Finnish colleagues on their great work. You have made our job a lot easier and we look forward to building on your outstanding chairmanship and adding new value to the present work being done.

While I try to build suspense for the Icelandic priority areas, I want to emphasise the role that each of us plays in the well-functioning of the Arctic Council. Our common ground and common responsibility is the Arctic. Our duty is to work together. We may not all agree on

every single issue, but I do dare to say that we do share a common understanding, namely that the Arctic is an important region not only to all of us present here today, but also in the context of global environmental developments. Our common goal is to ensure sustainable development in the Arctic, focussing equally on each of the three pillars of sustainability and emphasising active collaboration and knowledge-building.

Looking ahead, and trying to envisage what the future could hold for us, we know that scientific research indicates that we can expect, due to climate change, more drastic changes to the Arctic environment in the next two decades than in the past hundred years. Even a fully implemented Paris Agreement is not expected to curb global warming until after the middle of the 21st Century.

As a result, we must anticipate that the Arctic ice will continue to melt and that ice-free marine areas will grow during the summer months. Adapting to the continuing warming of the Arctic and building resilience will be a major challenge for many of the small Arctic communities, not least to indigenous people and their ways of life.

The Council's focus on sustainable development, and the scientific work that has been carried out by its subsidiary bodies, has yielded an important basis for discussions on a variety of important issues. The Arctic Council has, for instance, increased and broadened our understanding of the Arctic ecosystem, enabling us to make informed decisions on how we approach the region's environment and

resources. This is relevant to states outside the Arctic, which may explain growing interest in obtaining observer status in recent years.

Growing international interest in Arctic matters demonstrates a dramatic change in international priorities from what they were just 15 years ago. The geostrategic situation in the region has changed and this reality is also reflected in the Arctic Council's international status and the attention that the work of the Council enjoys. It has evolved from being a peripheral regional venue to being a truly central body for co-operation in the region.

A changing climate poses new challenges and makes it increasingly important to ensure that the Arctic remains a low-tension area. While the Arctic Council does not address military security, it is an important venue for dialogue and peaceful co-operation in the Arctic region. Its clear mandate and regional focus on sustainable development and knowledge-building has allowed it to continue its work, irrespective of global political tensions.

Our shared interest in avoiding a military build-up, or worse conflicts, in the North cannot be overstated. In this regard, increased military activities in the North Atlantic and the Arctic are a source of concern. Reaching common understandings and solutions, while respecting international law that govern the region and maintaining the stability that has, so far, characterized the region is of global interest.

Working closely with all partners, inside as well as outside the region, is of utmost importance for both prosperity and security in the

Arctic region. The conflictual elements that may result from the opening-up of the Arctic make the Council's contribution to sustainable development in the region increasingly relevant. In fact, sustainable development may be the single most important element to reduce tensions and, thereby, alleviate the risk of military build-up.

In this respect I truly believe that an active dialogue, based on state-of-the-art scientific research, conducted through dynamic collaboration between our countries and organizations, is the best way forward for a constructive development of the Arctic Council.

Dear colleagues, leaders of Permanent participants organisations, observers,

I very much look forward to introducing the Icelandic Chairmanship priorities later here today, as well as to our continued and constructive debates.

Thank you.