

**Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Sweden**

**Ms. Margot Wallström**

**At the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting**

**May 7, 2019**

**Lappi Arena**

**Rovaniemi, Finland**

Excellencies, colleagues, Arctic friends,

I have listened carefully to the wise words expressed by all friends of the Arctic gathered around this table - Arctic states and Permanent Participants. All in the presence of excellent, hardworking Arctic Council experts and dedicated observers.

The message I hear is clear.

I hear a testimony about the importance of the Arctic Council. To help keep the Arctic a region of peace, stability and international cooperation.

I hear a testimony about the opportunities this cooperation creates to realize the great potential inherent in this region.

But first and foremost, I hear a testimony about a region of continued challenges and change. And yes – the scientific findings are robust: a climate crisis in the Arctic is not a future scenario – it is happening as we speak. It affects all the people who exist and work here, their everyday lives and prospects for the future.

In Fairbanks two years ago, I posed the question what Mother Earth would say if she had a seat at our table.

That she perhaps would remind us how the Arctic functions as our cooling system, perhaps how concerned she would be by the fact that things are changing so fast.

That only two decades from now, the Arctic Ocean could be largely free of ice in the summer.

That our planet has done all she can to dampen and absorb, to keep Greenland and the permafrost in Siberia intact. That she has sent us no invoices. But that this is about to change.

If anything, this has become clearer since we last met in Fairbanks.

The IPCC 1,5 degrees report speaks volumes.

On my way here, I read the Arctic Climate Change Update 2019, highlighting new findings. Annual air temperatures in 2014 to 2018 were all greater than any year since 1900. Sea ice volume in September declining by 75 percent since 1979.

This all demonstrates the importance of a fact and science based approach and the urgency of action.

Needless to say, making observations are not the same thing as taking action. Our current and future to-do-lists are daunting.

But something has happened. Perhaps a global tipping point of awareness and dedication has been passed with the emergence of an inspiring new generation of climate activists - the Greta Thunberg's of this world.

And the fact that climate change is manmade, should paradoxically give room for some optimism. It's in man's and women's hands to do something about it.

As always, the voices of indigenous people remind us that we are links in a chain. I hope that my grandson will grow up and still be able to see living polar bears.

Friends,

We all know the Arctic region is not an isolated land of ice.

It is not only wild nature and harsh landscapes.

It is a region very much defined by the people living there.

The Swedish Arctic is reindeer herding, important mining and top universities.

It is breath-taking environments and popular tourist destinations, high-tech IT installations and space industry.

I invite you to come and see for yourselves. In October, Sweden is pleased to co-host - with the European Union - an Arctic Forum in our northern city of Umeå, back-to-back with the Barents Euro-Arctic Council Ministerial. I hope to see you there.

The North should develop and its people be able to lead good lives. Just as in any other part of our communities.

This underlines the need for sustainable development - economic, social and environmental.

With science-based policies and with the Paris agreement and the 2030 Agenda in place, we have a solid base from which to do so.

Our common goal, to save the Arctic, requires new scientific research, business innovation, shared priorities and a political will.

We need to take many determined steps towards a sustainable future.

And largely, over the years, I think the Arctic Council has succeeded in building a political environment that generates win-win solutions. So it's with regret I note that this year we did not manage to agree on a joint declaration.

The challenges in the Arctic will require an even closer cooperation. I pledge that Sweden will continue to support a strong Arctic Council.

\*\*\*

Dear Timo, I want to thank you and your team for a job very well done and for your generous hospitality. And I want to support your Chairman's Statement from this meeting.]

And to Gudlaugur, good luck! And count on us. We're in this together!

Thank You!