Thank you for your kind hospitality and for hosting this meeting under these unusual circumstances. It is a true pleasure to see all of you here and to be gathered around the same table again.

Let me start by underlining that the commitment of all Arctic states to maintain peace, stability and the spirit of cooperation in the Arctic is essential to the success of the Arctic Council.

Our cooperation is based on common interests, joint commitments and respect for international law.

Today, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Arctic Council as the leading forum for cooperation among the Arctic states. Over the course of these years we have worked together constructively and found common and concrete solutions to the challenges we face in the Arctic. And we will continue to do so.
During the pandemic, the Arctic Council has demonstrated its ability to cope with sudden and unexpected change.

The fact that all eight foreign ministers are present around the table today underlines the importance we attach to this forum.

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The adoption of a strategic plan is testimony to our strength and unity and reflects our shared values, priorities and aspirations for the Council in the years to come.

We are united in our commitment to effective cooperation by our shared perspectives on international law, climate change, environmental protection, the state of Arctic oceans and sustainable local communities in the Arctic. No Arctic state can solve the challenges in the Arctic alone.

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The Arctic Council works to ensure healthy living conditions and sustainable growth for Arctic inhabitants, including indigenous peoples, and to promote an economically and environmentally viable future for Arctic communities.

The Arctic is home to approximately four million people and roughly 9 % of Norway’s population lives in this region. It is essential to ensure that the region remains an attractive place to live and work, in particular for young people.
Under Iceland’s leadership the Council has successfully delivered on its goal to develop new knowledge about the challenges facing the Arctic, including climate change.

We welcome the increased cooperation on ocean issues and appreciate in particular the Council’s efforts in relation to marine litter and plastics.

We also acknowledge the work that been started to assess the effects of the pandemic in the Arctic and hope to see further activities in support of public health.

There is increasing global awareness of the impacts of climate change in the Arctic and we value the cooperation with - and contributions of - the Arctic Council observers. We will continue to support efforts to integrate them more fully into the Council’s work.

In keeping with tradition I will now give the floor to the President of the Samediggi, Aili Keskitalo.

Thank you.