

## ARCTIC COUNCIL SAO-MEETING

The university of Oulu, Finland, May 15-16, 2002

Opening speech by Mr Kari Nenonen, Mayor, City of Oulu

Dear Ambassadors, representatives of the Arctic Council member countries, permanent participants, observers and working groups, ladies and gentlemen

It's my great pleasure to welcome the Arctic Council's SAO- meeting to Oulu. On behalf of City of Oulu, I would like to thank the Arctic Council for this great opportunity to host this meeting and to greet all the representatives of Northern areas with my speech. My intension is to give you an idea of Oulu as a Northern Centre of Expertise.

The City of Oulu was founded 1605. The Oulu region has risen to an international fame since the early 1990s as a centre for IT research and production. This success has led to a rapid expansion in the population of the region, by 3000 - 4000 persons a year on average, giving it a total of approximately 195 000 inhabitants in the region and 124 000 in the city by December 2001.

This represents the highest rate of growth recorded anywhere in Finland outside the Helsinki conurbation and makes it the only centre in Northern Finland with an increasing population. The majority of the increase is attributable to in-migration attracted by the flourishing economy of the area, its good employment and study opportunities and its well-developed social services.

In brief, the Oulu region today is

- A growing European centre of expertise with some 195 000 inhabitants in the region, 124 000 in the city
- The fourth largest urban agglomeration in Finland, with an annual growth rate of some 4000 - 5000 people. Geographically, it serves as the centre for an area equivalent to a half of Finland.
- The economic, educational, research and service centre for Northern Finland.
- Oulu has a multi-faculty university with a student enrolment of 14 000 serving the whole of Northern Finland. The 6 faculties represented are the Humanities, Education, Natural Sciences, Medicine, Technology and Economics. Oulu also has a polytechnic with 3500 students.
- The Oulu region has about 80 000 jobs, mostly in industry and the service sector.
- Approximately 12 000 people are employed in the high-tech sphere, the number of positions in IT having increased by more than 100% between 1993 and 1998.
- There are some 8000 companies functioning in the Oulu region, varying in size from very small-scale enterprises to Nokia, with around 5000 employees.
- About 150 new companies are registered in the region every year.
- Oulu Technopolis, founded in 1982, is the oldest-established science park in the Nordic Countries. It now houses more than 200 companies with a combined employment of around 5000 persons and premises amounting to a total floor area of over 130 000 m<sup>2</sup>. Its main fields of activity are telecommunications, electronics, information technology, medical technology and biotechnology.
- The region is best known internationally for the “Oulu Phenomenon”, rapid expansion to become a high-tech growth centre specialized in wireless communications technology.

- Logistically, Oulu is readily accessible by sea, rail, road and air, with 14 regular flights a day from Helsinki or Stockholm.

Oulu is the functional and economic centre of the sparsely populated northern part of Finland and Scandinavia, and has geographically the largest sphere of influence of any node in the country's network of population centres apart from the Helsinki conurbation, comprising the provinces of Northern Ostrobothnia, Kainuu and Lapland.

City of Oulu and its public and private partners take active roles in many international networks and cooperation projects. In fact, in our vision for 2011 we have declared our wish to serve as a centre of expertise and economic development for Northern Europe. We are willing to cooperate with other representative bodies and subregions concerned for the best strategic development of Northern areas.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are now in the University of Oulu. This university, that was established in 1958 as an act of regional politics, is one of the most important driving forces behind our development. Referring to the SAO- Meeting agenda including issues like World Summit on Sustainable Development and Diversity and Health of Tundra, I would like to point out that northern issues is one of the five areas of special interest for the University of Oulu. Thule Institute with a mission to develop the northern focus in the University of Oulu operates here as an independent national institute for northern and arctic research.

The northern research projects in Thule Institute and in different departments of the University of Oulu focus on the following major themes, confirming to [the strategy for the development of the northern research](#) in the University of Oulu:

- global environmental change
- resources, technology and sustainable development
- change of the northern culture
- northern health and welfare

Thule Institute aims to consolidate the position of Finland in the international field of northern studies by implementing, supporting and promoting cross-disciplinary research projects, to develop and improve the research infrastructure and thereby to gain a role as an internationally acknowledged research institute.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to end my speech by wishing you the most successful meeting and an enjoyable stay in our northern city. Thank you for your attention.