

## Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting

Iqaluit April 24, 2015

### Statement by Sweden

Dear colleagues,

I would like to begin by thanking Canada for chairing the Arctic Council for the last two years.

In particular, I wish to pay tribute to its successful efforts to ensure that the Council remains a forum for political dialogue and cooperation during otherwise globally challenging times.

It is a pleasure to meet with the Council in Iqaluit, Nunavut, in the High North, a place that illustrates both the opportunities and challenges of the Arctic region. My thanks go to Minister Aglukkaq for providing this perspective.

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The Arctic is foremost about people. Four million women, men and children live north of the Polar Circle.

The well-being of all Arctic people is fundamental. However, the identity, culture and traditional industries of the indigenous peoples in particular are threatened by climate change.

Economic opportunities, social care and good communications are key to the livelihood of people in the High North. In this context, I welcome the establishment of the Arctic Economic Council.

I also call for increased participation of women and young people in the political processes regarding the Arctic.

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The Arctic environment is unique and highly sensitive. The extraction of natural resources and the use of renewable resources must – and I stress must – take place in a sustainable manner.

In fact, Sweden would like to see an even stronger environmental dimension in the Council, including active participation in its work by the Ministers of Environment.

The Arctic region is changing radically. Average temperatures are rising twice as fast in the Arctic region as they are elsewhere in the world. Arctic sea ice cover was never as small as in 2012.

Global efforts to keep the global temperature rise under two degrees by 2100 must be prioritised. Stronger action on climate change and renewable energy is essential.

For this reason, there is a direct link between the work of the Arctic Council and the need for an effective international climate agreement in Paris in December 2015. Members of the Council, because of the changes in the Arctic, have a special responsibility to push for this.

A key element in an active environmental policy for the Arctic is to strengthen *resilience*, our capacity to mitigate and adapt to the changes in Arctic ecosystems. The Arctic Council should adopt recommendations to that effect at the Ministerial Meeting in 2017.

We support the process in the Council to establish a network of Marine Protected Areas. We welcome the US initiative to develop a Regional Seas Arrangement.

At the heart of the Council's activities are climate change action and the protection of the Arctic region's fragile environment. The importance of this work – conducted on a daily basis by expert working groups, often without much public recognition – cannot be overestimated. I say this, not least, given my personal experience as EU Commissioner for the Environment.

I welcome the decision to implement the Framework for Action on Enhanced Black Carbon and Methane Emissions Reductions.

Having said this, we must continue to press for further measures to reduce these emissions.

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Dear Colleagues,

That the Arctic continues to be a zone of peace and stability is paramount. As stated in the *Vision for the Arctic*, there is no problem that cannot be solved through cooperative relationships. The Arctic Council's role as a forum for political dialogue is especially important in times of conflict and tension.

The decision to conduct a review of observership issues is important. The Arctic is a region of national, regional and global interest. Non-Arctic States, as well as relevant organisations, can contribute to the work of the Council.

Sweden wants the EU to be a strong cooperation partner with the Council.

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Finally, I'd like to return to our wish to see an even stronger environmental dimension in the Council.

Adaptation to a changed climate requires good knowledge. Swedish Arctic climate research has a proud tradition.

In connection with the US Chairmanship of the Council, the Swedish Government, in cooperation with policy think tank CSIS, is holding a high-level conference in Washington on 19–20 May on Arctic issues, climate change being one of them.

It is my hope that this conference will contribute to further efforts in an area of critical importance to present and future generations.

In this spirit, I welcome the US chairmanship of the Arctic Council 2015-2017 and wish it every success.

Dear colleagues,

I'm looking forward to our discussions and exchange of views here in Iqaluit.

Thank you.