

Governor Hannele Pokka  
Arctic Council Meeting  
Saariselkä 8 October 2002, 2 p.m.

Honoured ministers, ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen!

It is with great pleasure I wish you all welcome to Lapland, the northernmost province of the European Union.

Here in Lapland we have more reindeer than people. The population of Lapland including the reindeer is over half a million. The population density is approximately two inhabitants per square kilometre, which makes Lapland one of the most densely populated Arctic regions. Our countryside is still clean and the air is fresh. These are things that are becoming increasingly significant. The greatest challenge for us Laplanders is how we can safeguard equal opportunities for education and job acquisition for the youth of this region in order to avoid many having to search for livelihoods elsewhere.

The Finnish presidency of the regional level co-operative association of the Northern Forum that currently represents 30 Arctic regions of the Arctic Council and is soon to reach the end of its term has been involved in tight co-operation with the Arctic Council. There are a number of ongoing practical joint ventures that all share the same objective; the improvement of the living conditions of the northern peoples. An example of such a development project is the improvement of the operational requirements for the reindeer economy. In this project, especially the northern regions of Finland and Russia are working together. There is also a sustainable tourism project with the intention of discovering common operational principles for the development of tourism and tourism construction in the Arctic regions.

Environmental issues are still a topical matter for the peoples of the North. A great deal of information is now available on the state of the environment and the changes it is undergoing. We are now aware what emissions are absorbed by people and animals. We know what are the worst pollution sources in the Arctic regions. Now that we know so much, we need to act in order that the state of the Arctic environment may improve. The peoples of the North should expect concrete results from Arctic co-operation on both the state and regional levels.

The improvement of the state environment of the Arctic co-operation can not succeed without finance. Furthermore, it is normally a question of substantial investment. Investments in the environment have inspired discussion but no real action. One workable action model is available by utilising partnership agreements. For example the intention is to implement the environmental projects of the European Union's Northern Dimension in the future on the basis of environmental partnership agreements. The financing of loans is arranged by international banks. Donated funds are provided by the EU as well as Russia and the Nordic nations.

Arctic co-operation also requires an environmental fund based on partnership agreements in order to get the process moving.

Saariselkä hosted the Arctic Women's Conference in August. The seminar made a great impression on all who participated. Rarely have I been witness to such touching addresses on the lives of women, social security and future expectations in the North. I would like to hear more such impressive addresses. It is my wish that the entire Arctic Council could improve its understanding of what exactly the peoples of the North expect from their futures, how they live, how they are, and are the youth planning to stay or move elsewhere.

Arctic co-operation can not merely be a discussion on the upper level on the desires and objectives of nations, moreover the inhabitants of the northern regions must feel that the co-operation is important and is committed to the set goals. The connection of the Arctic actors with the northern regions and with its peoples should be continuous and solid. In this respect, co-operation between the actors on the regional and central administrative levels is important.

Please allow me to once again wish you all a very warm welcome to Lapland and Saariselkä.