Exploring Common Solutions for the Arctic Environment

- Dear colleagues, Permanent Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- This week, the IPCC launched its special report on global warming of 1.5 degrees.

- According to the report, ice free summers may occur in the Arctic once per decade at two degrees of warming – but very rarely at 1.5 degrees.

- Limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees could prevent the thawing of a permafrost area of 2 million square kilometers. That's the size of Mexico.

- An additional warming of 0.5 degrees makes a big difference for the Arctic – and for the world.

- This confirms the need for increased ambition in the Paris Agreement. Our main concern must be to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases as a matter of urgency.

- In Katowice in December, we will adopt the rule book for the Paris Agreement. This guidance is necessary to make the Paris Agreement work and give it credibility and trust.

- At the same time, we should be ready to step up action to achieve the goals in the Paris Agreement, and to consider our targets.

*****

- How can we ensure that our efforts to develop Arctic societies and economies are in line with our low emission targets?

- Investment in low carbon infrastructure is essential. According to the OECD, a small increase in annual investments could make infrastructure climate compatible. This would also increase growth, productivity and well-being. Extra costs are likely to be offset by fuel savings.

- This is good news for the Arctic, where fuel costs and per capita emissions are high. Smart and clean infrastructure will reduce emissions, and make Arctic societies more resilient. The potential for low carbon development and investments represent major opportunities for Arctic economies.

- The Arctic needs sustainable cities, low carbon transportation, renewable energy and energy efficiency. The policies needed to stimulate this are the same in the Arctic as everywhere else.

- Our societies must adapt to climate change. But we must also adapt to the measures necessary to counter it, and the transition to low-carbon societies. Norway is currently assessing what these "carbon risks" means for our economy. This issue is highly relevant to the resilience of Arctic societies.

- Implementing the Arctic Council collective goal on black carbon is an important task for all of us. While the collective goal is aspirational, our national efforts to reach this goal should be concrete and ambitious.

- Norway is striving to reduce our emissions of black carbon beyond the substantial reductions anticipated in a business as usual-scenario, through a number of measures integral in our climate and pollution policies.

*****

- Climate change is by far the most serious threat to Arctic biodiversity. But it's not the only one. Infrastructure, industry and resource exploitation has negative impact on biodiversity and its traditional use by indigenous and local people in many parts of the Arctic.

- Parallel to climate concerns, biodiversity concerns must be integrated into our development agenda in order to minimize cumulative impacts.

- We need a broad approach to ecosystem based management under changing climates, coordinated across the Arctic. This should include a network of Arctic marine protected areas, and protection of sea-ice dependent wildlife and habitats.

*****

- In the Arctic, pollution prevention is far more effective than clean-up. A ban on heavy fuel oil as fuel for ships in the Arctic would reduce risks of accidental oil spills. Norway has prohibited the use of heavy fuel oil on ships in the protected areas around Svalbard. My point of view is that this ban should be expanded to Arctic waters in general.

- We have submitted a proposal to the International Maritime Organization to ban heavy fuel oil as fuel for ships in Arctic waters, in cooperation with Finland, Sweden, the United States, Iceland, Germany, the Netherlands and New Zealand. I hope that all of you will support this proposal. Norway will continue our efforts to this end in IMO and other relevant international fora.

- Marine plastic pollution is threatening marine life and food safety across the world, and this is an emerging concern in the Arctic.

- The Arctic Council is preparing an overview of marine litter and microplastics in the Arctic. I look forward to this study as a basis for our further efforts.

- A number of Norwegian measures could serve as inspiration for other countries: "Fishing for litter" projects where litter collected at sea can be returned free of charge, improved waste facilities in harbors, extensive beach clean-ups, and contributions to prevent plastic waste in developing countries from ending up in the sea.

- The Arctic Council could play a key role through regional monitoring and assessments, and by developing an Arctic Action Plan to coordinate efforts to combat marine litter and microplastics in the Arctic.

- In order to combat plastic pollution in the Arctic Ocean, we have to curtail discharges worldwide. This is a challenge not only to Arctic Council member states, but to the observer countries as well.

- In addition, we should explore possible cooperation between the Arctic Council and other fora, and support to the leadership role of United Nations Environment Assembly in bringing international efforts together.

*****

- To sum up, how can we strengthen our environmental cooperation in the Arctic?

- Through the Arctic Economic Council and the Arctic Stakeholder Forum, we can promote investments in Arctic low carbon infrastructure.

- Through the Arctic Council, we can shape a low-carbon Arctic development agenda, and consider an even more ambitious collective reduction target for Black Carbon and methane.

- Finally – all countries with a stake in the Arctic should ensure that they are firmly in line with the Paris Agreement.