

**Address by H.E. Valgerður Sverrisdóttir  
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland**

**Arctic Council V Ministerial Meeting**

Salekhard, Russia  
October 26, 2006



Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Iceland  
October 26, 2006

Mr. Chairman, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I would like to congratulate Russia on its successful Chairmanship of the Arctic Council. I welcome in particular the initiative the Russian Chairmanship has taken in presenting the Arctic Council to the people in the Russian Arctic. In the past two years, the Arctic Council has met in the city in Yakutsk, Khanty Mansiysk (Borið fram Hantí Mansísk), Syktyvkar, and now we are in Salekhard. All these cities are important for the Arctic, and it is important for the Arctic Council to be introduced to the people living here.

I am also pleased that Russia has ensured the continuity of the work of the Arctic Council, has followed up on previous projects and introduced new projects of its own.

The last ten years have proven the value of the Arctic Council as a forum for promoting cooperation and information exchange among the people of the Arctic. One of its strengths has been the flexibility inherent in its structure. This has made it easier for the Arctic Council to accommodate the different perspectives of its members. We all have different histories, cultures, politics and styles. We should continue to foster this tradition of diversity and flexibility. This will make us better prepared to adapt to the changing realities of the Arctic.

Never before have we witnessed such rapid changes in the Arctic Region. The climate is warming and the ice is melting. Life itself, both animals and plants, is changing, affecting the living conditions of the people in the Arctic. This has repercussions for the activities of the Arctic Council and its working groups.

The Arctic Council has played an important role in climate change research in the Arctic and I am confident that it will continue to do so. It can also play an important role as a venue for exchanging information and coordinating efforts of monitoring and adapting to climate change. There is need for continual updating of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment based on further research and monitoring.

Climate change is not the only reason for the changing living conditions in the Arctic. Exploitation of oil, gas and other resources using modern technology are changing the Arctic even faster than the warming climate. The Arctic Council can play a role in helping the people in the Arctic to adapt to these trends in order to improve their lives.

The Arctic Human Development Report has proven valuable for understanding the living conditions of the people in the Arctic. A follow-up project on developing Arctic Social Indicators for monitoring the changes in human development in the Arctic is being led by Icelandic Scientists. The Oil and Gas Assessment, prepared by AMAP, is also important in this respect.

The development of marine transportation in the Arctic is yet another area that need to be highlighted. New shipping routes are opening in connection with resource development, new technologies and climate change. I believe that the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment organized by PAME (bórið fram Peim), should be seen as a priority issue for the Arctic Council. To bring this into a sharper focus, Iceland is planning an international conference on Arctic Shipping in March of next year.

Modern IT-technology is transforming the possibilities for communication in the Arctic, giving people in remote areas access to instant information and services on the internet. I am pleased to announce the opening of an Arctic Portal on the internet, which Iceland has developed in cooperation with other partners in the Arctic Council.

Finally I would like to thank the Russian Chairmanship and the people of Salekhard for their generous hospitality during this meeting.

Thank you