

ARCTIC COUNCIL
3RD MINISTERIAL MEETING
in Inari, Finland, October 9-10, 2002

Opening speech by Mr Erkki Tuomioja, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Finland

Dear Colleagues and Arctic Friends,

After two intensive years of arctic cooperation under our chairmanship it is a great pleasure to wish you all welcome to the 3rd Arctic Council Foreign Ministers' Meeting, in the heart of the Saami domicile area in Finnish Lapland. The broad participation in this meeting shows that the Council is more than an intergovernmental meeting in a closed circle, it is a forum for Arctic actors in a wider sense.

When I two years ago presented our chairmanship agenda for the Finnish press I drew attention to the unique cooperation between governments and indigenous peoples in the Arctic. I am pleased to report that this partnership has been further strengthened, including with joint and well coordinated actions at the international level. The Finnish Government is committed to securing the financing of the Saami Council's international activities, including participation in the Arctic Council.

When Finland in Barrow assumed the chairmanship of the Council our common aim was to strengthen the voice of the Council at the global level. We have done so.

The signing of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants is a remarkable achievement, especially as this convention singles out the Arctic as a sink for pollutants originating far away from the region. We have achieved this together on the basis of AMAP's 1997 Assessment report and informed by indigenous traditional knowledge.

The Johannesburg Summit recognized the Arctic Council as an important regional contributor to sustainable development. It supported the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment and named it a model for dealing with climate change impacts also in other regions. The Summit reaffirmed the vital role of indigenous peoples in sustainable development. The Johannesburg Plan of

Implementation gives boost to global developments of importance for the Arctic. I think we have reason to be pleased with our joint achievements in Johannesburg. It should encourage us to contribute strongly to the implementation efforts both inside the Arctic and at the global level.

To that end we also need closer cooperation with the European Union, and the Commission in particular. The preparation of a new and second Northern Dimension Action Plan provides an opportunity for the EU to reconsider its Arctic interests and obligations.

Dear Friends

At this meeting AMAP will present its second assessment report on pollution in the Arctic. The report confirms that concerted actions against pollution takes effect. But it also gives cause for concern regarding increased problems, such as the emergence of new POPs in the Arctic food chain.

The Council has emphasized scientifically based decision-making as the basis for its activities. We need to follow this principle when we consider conclusions on the basis of AMAP's and other reports by our expert bodies. This is a demanding principle. It often means that we have to challenge vested interests.

One conclusion I draw from the AMAP's report is that we need to improve our home work. We need to intensify our regional cooperation, including on financing investments, to eliminate sources of persistent organic pollutants and mercury in Arctic areas. We need to reinforce our support to developing countries in their efforts to implement the Stockholm Convention. And we need to prepare for appropriate international steps to address mercury and new POPs, in line with the Johannesburg commitment on chemicals. And, finally, we need to work more smoothly together to prevent nuclear waste from contaminating Arctic living resources.

Finalization of the so called MNEPR-agreement without further delay would release considerable financial resources from G8 sources and the Northern Dimension Support Fund for nuclear waste management in Russia.

Dear Friends

Climate change is not a futuristic theory in the Arctic. It is already taking place with largely unpredictable effects on every day life, as has been reported from indigenous communities in many parts of the Arctic. No sustainable development strategy can be developed for the Arctic without taking into consideration the environmental, economical and social climate change impacts. This explains why so high expectations are attached to the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment.

In a situation where Arctic states are divided regarding the Kyoto Protocol, our cooperation in the Arctic is nevertheless encouraging. But public opinion is aware and is monitoring our will and ability to tackle climate issues in the Arctic. In the next few years we need to agree upon appropriate conclusions based on the findings of our best scientific experts who are preparing the Assessment Report.

The Johannesburg recommendations on the urgent need to reverse the current trend in natural resource degradation provide a new global background to many activities under way in the Arctic Council.

The Arctic states are facing a demanding challenge in striking the balance between expanded use of hydrocarbons and minerals, conservation of the unique Arctic biodiversity and securing sustainability in the use of living resources. In the era of globalisation we may need specific measures to secure that affected indigenous and other local communities not only benefit from new economic activities but are able to find their living also within traditional industries, including reindeer husbandry, hunting, fishing and gathering. Arctic Council can make a difference in exchanging information about best practises regarding benefit sharing mechanisms as part of projects using especially non-renewable natural resources in regions traditionally inhabited by indigenous peoples.

The new circumpolar map on oil resources at risk and the updated offshore oil and gas guidelines are indications of the Council's ability to meet the challenge. The Council still needs to further promote the dialogue among stakeholders and more thoroughly assess the consequences of oil and gas developments in the Arctic. In Johannesburg we have all committed ourselves to use environmental impact assessment procedures, which in the Arctic

should include also social and cultural impacts on indigenous and other local communities.

Dear Friends

The transfer of the relay from one Arctic Government to another should not affect the continuity of our work. The Barrow Declaration prepared by the U.S. Government has together with our own priorities guided our chairmanship well. We do hope that the decisions at this meeting will well guide the Icelandic Chairmanship. We have worked closely together to prepare the new initiative, the Arctic Human Development Report. I hope that this initiative will help to invigorate the Arctic Council's work on economic, social and cultural issues.

In our work to promote human development we also have to focus especially on gender issues, on women and men living together, supporting each other, bearing responsibilities together on the basis of gender equality values. The Taking Wing Conference here in Saariselkä in early August paved the way for gender mainstreaming in the Arctic. At this meeting we should commit ourselves to take that work further, including the urgent need to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

Children and youth is our priority. We have no future in the Arctic without a well educated and trained youth – and here I am referring to both, formal education as well as traditional knowledge. We need to better involve the youth themselves – to better learn why so many are migrating even in situations where employment is offered.

Dear Friends

I want to emphasize that there should not be any contradictions between man and nature in the Arctic. The fight against pollution is closely related to the enhancement of public health. Sustainable use of living resources is part of conservation and biodiversity protection strategies. Tourism can't be sustainable without respect for the nature and indigenous cultural values that makes the Arctic so attractive to increasing number of tourists. Let us together build an agenda for the next two years which inspires us all to further strengthen circumpolar cooperation.

I wish you all warmly welcome. I now invite the Governor of the hosting region Lapland Ms Hannele Pokka to take the floor.