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The Kingdom of Denmark.
Chairmanship of the Arctic Council 2009-2011.

Securing a forward looking approach and a strong platform for the Arctic Council in the present dynamics of a changing Arctic is a primary objective of the chairmanship of the Kingdom of Denmark.

The Government of Denmark will be coordinating the chairmanship in close cooperation with the Governments of Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

The Arctic region is an amplifier of the effects that pollution and other climate change drivers have on Earth. Therefore, documenting, analyzing and publishing levels and effects of contaminants and the changes taking place in snow, water, ice and permafrost in the Arctic is paramount to lay the groundwork for our understanding of global mechanisms including weather patterns, the changes in sea levels as well as impact on flora and fauna.

Following the release of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) report in 2004, a steady increasing amount of international evidence and research is being published indicating that the Arctic is experiencing much more rapid climate change than the rest of the world. Recent measurements of the extent of Arctic Sea ice and the mass balance of the Greenland Ice Sheet shows that effects of climate change have accelerated compared to projections shown by current climate models.

The Arctic Council has the potential to become a vital player in a region undergoing rapid and significant change. International outreach, research and co-operation with key actors in different policy fields will be crucial in securing the success of the Council as an organization that embraces the potential for economic development and prosperity in the North while at the same time respecting and safeguarding the rights and interests of the peoples and the states of the Arctic.

Peoples of the Arctic

The Arctic Council is faced with new and increasingly diverse challenges as the world's attention is directed towards the North. Sustainable development, human health,

environmental protection, conservation of Arctic flora and fauna and the preservation of the livelihoods of indigenous peoples and Arctic communities still remains at the core of Arctic Council work. However, retreating ice caps and sea ice increase the access to hydrocarbons and other non-renewable as well as renewable resources of the Arctic. Together with the rapidly changing world market prices and the potentially increasing maritime traffic, exploration and exploitation activities in the Arctic are issues which are bound to influence the peoples of the Arctic and therefore the work of the Arctic Council.

In order to be able to effectively address the diverse concerns and developments in the Arctic, the Council must therefore – in a holistic perspective - address environmental protection, human health, sustainable use of resources and the ongoing economic development and in this regard support the development of observation and data sharing systems that serve societal needs relating to environmental, social, economic and cultural change.

Nature and the environment are key elements in the day-to-day living for the peoples of the Arctic. Drawing on personal experience, information shared with others and knowledge handed down through generations enables residents of the Arctic to recognize local environmental and biological changes. The interaction between traditional knowledge in the local communities and scientific research is therefore of great value.

The chairmanship will focus on enhancing monitoring and assessments to give a more complete picture of status and trends in the availability of both species that are essential to traditional lifestyles and new species that in the future could constitute important resources for a sustainable Arctic.

In line with requests by the parliamentarians of the Arctic Region and the Nordic Council of Ministers, the aim of the chairmanship is to promote cooperation and to facilitate synergies from existing work in the area to provide for better human health in harmony with cultural values of the indigenous peoples and Arctic communities. In this light high priority will be given to review and integrate data obtained from environmental studies with the changed climate conditions in combination with human health surveys and the changing living conditions experienced and foreseen in the Arctic. The purpose is to be able to take a broad comprehensive view on the existing separate assessments and the knowledge obtained in the Arctic Council and thus gives an

indication on the overall direction of the health of the Arctic peoples and the Arctic ecosystems.

Indeed, the changing living conditions and lifestyles in the Arctic call for an increased focus on human health initiatives and on data necessary to support such initiatives. Due to traditional living conditions, peoples of the Arctic are more exposed to higher levels of environmental contaminants including heavy metals such as mercury in the food. Some contaminants are highly toxic while others are endocrine disrupters that in addition to reproductive effects are also being connected with lifestyle conditions as diabetes and obesity. This is why the successive Norwegian-Danish-Swedish chairmanships of the Arctic Council 2006-2013 in their common objectives stress the need to further strengthen the cooperative efforts in the area of Arctic human health.

Greenland – as co-host and chair of the Sustainable Development Working Group – intends during the chairmanship to strengthen the focus on the various cooperative efforts in the area of Arctic human health with a view to obtain an indication of the overall direction of the health situation in the Arctic, inter alia by assisting the newly established Arctic Human Health Expert Group in highlighting research, monitoring, and capacity building activities in Arctic human health.

The IPY legacy

During the international polar year 2007-2009 intensive scientific effort has been devoted to improving the understanding of Arctic and with much attention on the environmental effects in the Arctic, including the accumulation of contaminants and mercury in the food chain, and climate conditions and the interconnection between the Arctic and the global climate. Results of IPY projects will emerge over the next few years and the Council should take an active role in securing a permanent legacy of the IPY effort. A framework for the further strengthening of data collection and scientific co-operation should be established to maintain new partnerships, networks, and co-operations that have been established during the IPY.

The results of the IPY effort should be highlighted and integrated in the ongoing work of the Council. The current IPY has exceptional importance in providing a comprehensive snapshot of the polar climate at a time when Arctic climate change is accelerating, and in certain aspects may be approaching a tipping point.

The legacy of the IPY should reach beyond the pure scientific achievements and should enable scientists, policy-makers, and Arctic residents to continue to work together to understand and to address the big scientific outcomes of the IPY. The Arctic Council and its working groups are the natural relevant body to assess and to take responsibility for the realization of IPY aspects which are specific of the Arctic and are of potentially great influence on the future development in the Arctic and the to be used in a best possible manner for Arctic management and governance.

Climate Change

The Arctic plays a key role in the global climate system. Substantial global reductions of greenhouse gas emissions are a prerequisite for long term lasting stabilization of manmade climate change, and the member states of the Arctic Council are currently responsible for approximately 30% of global anthropogenic green house gas emission.

Mitigation of Arctic climate change is a global challenge, requiring political action at all levels and involvement of the public in the Arctic states.

The Arctic Council Project: “Climate Change and the Cryosphere: Snow, Water, Ice, Permafrost in the Arctic” will be finalized in 2011, but a preliminary report on the Greenland Ice sheet will be presented as an Arctic Council contribution to the 15th Conference of the parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen, December 2009. This conference offers an extraordinary opportunity to disseminate the most updated knowledge about Arctic climate change and its local, regional and global consequences and a possibility to bring Arctic concerns and opportunities to the attention of the world.

The cold and sparsely populated Arctic has a relatively high energy demand for heating and transport purposes, most of which is based on fossil fuel. Energy savings and higher energy efficiency offer an opportunity to reduce anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions from the Arctic region. At the same time, the potential for extended use of renewable energy sources offers development opportunities on a sustainable basis in the Arctic region.

The rapid changes also require Arctic societies to respond and adapt to the challenges of changing weather conditions of the Arctic. The Council should therefore play an important role in a systematic collection and reporting on Arctic climate change

adaptation. In this connection attention must be paid to possible changes and new threats to the fragile Arctic ecosystems including living resources of importance to Arctic Societies as well as new opportunities that changes may generate.

Biodiversity

Climate change and the increase in activities in the Arctic have resulted in new challenges to Arctic biodiversity and the sustainable use of the Arctic's living resources. During the chairmanship work will continue to support cooperation on these matters and to identify regional and interregional programs, treaties and conventions where cooperation is relevant.

By recognizing that the United Nations has declared the year of 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity, the Arctic Council becomes an important player in helping to increase awareness locally, regionally and internationally of the importance of Arctic biodiversity.

In this light, the chairmanship will give high priority to the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment which will produce an Arctic Highlight report in 2010 and a scientific assessment to be finalized in 2013. This will be an important Arctic Council input to the United Nations 2010 Biodiversity Target and the International Biodiversity Year in 2010. It will also form the Arctic Council's input to the Global Outlook and a regional input to the UN Convention of Biological Diversity. In addition to this, the chairmanship will continue to support the important cooperation on conservation strategies and action plans for endangered species, ecosystems and species of importance for people living in Arctic.

In the light of new challenges to Arctic Biodiversity, the chairmanship recognizes the importance of securing long term biodiversity monitoring providing information on status and trends. Therefore, attention will be given to secure and facilitate full implementation of the Arctic Council's Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Program during the chairmanship.

Megatrends in the Arctic

Over the past years the Arctic Council has completed a number of major regional surveys and assessments (Survey of Living Conditions of the Arctic, Arctic Climate

Impact Assessment, Oil and Gas Assessment, Arctic Human Development Report) and new major assessments are scheduled to be completed 2009-2011. These and other reports, including on human health effects caused by environmental stressors and other ongoing programs will give a broad picture of needs and possibilities for environmental protection, prevention of human health effects and the sustainable development of the region. Together with the results of IPY-projects this might offer an outstanding platform for a description of the overall drivers in the Arctic, possible gaps in knowledge, but also the likely challenges and opportunities of Arctic societies over the next decades.

Integrated resource management

The successive Norwegian – Danish – Swedish chairmanships of the Arctic Council 2006-2013 have identified integrated management of resources as a cornerstone issue. The chairmanship of the Arctic Council adheres to the common objective that it is of vital importance that all activities take place based on high environmental standards, and that the exploitation of natural resources is sustainable and ecosystem based. Under the chairmanship, work will continue on the revision of the 2002 Arctic offshore and oil and gas guidelines making sure that these guidelines become more specific and can be used more effectively.

The scheduled Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment, The Arctic Biodiversity Assessment – highlight report and Human Health Assessment and SWIPA will together with other ongoing projects and programs comprise important inputs to this work.

Operational co-operation

The Arctic Council states and their peoples have a stewardship role in protecting the fragile and unique ecosystems and biodiversity of the North. The Ilulissat Declaration of 28 May 2008 underlines that co-operation among all interested parties including on the sharing of information, is a prerequisite for addressing future challenges.

There is a growing understanding that the capacity to respond to emergency crises in the Arctic should be improved and that the means to doing so is through the exchange of information, training and experience, technical development and support, and the co-ordination of response. Due to low population and infrastructure density, emergency response resources are thinly spread over a large area, making for instance search and rescue operations difficult to stage and manage. During the chairmanship work will

continue to support operational co-operation between the Arctic states on preparedness and prevention, acknowledging that national initiatives, existing treaties, conventions and agreements will provide the framework for this work. This work will form an important pillar upon which further preventive and preparedness work could be formulated

Responding to the general increase in activities taking place in the Arctic, and in line with the guidelines for the responsible management of petroleum and mineral resources in the Arctic, it would be useful to explore how co-operation could be enhanced to further the development of guidelines in fields such as tourism, shipping and maritime safety, etc. Work is currently underway in the International Maritime Organization to update and strengthen existing guidelines on navigation in ice covered waters. The Kingdom of Denmark believes that the Arctic states should collectively support such efforts. Preventing maritime emergencies is crucial in the protection of the Arctic.

The changes in the Arctic must be monitored, and in order to do that the Arctic Council requires effective and coordinated data services. Sharing of geographic information between the circumpolar countries and efficient use of geographic information for the thematic data presentation is one example which would help sharing the information between the circumpolar countries and help avoid duplication of work in the Council Working Groups.

The Arctic Council in a new geopolitical framework

The Arctic is undergoing significant changes these years which means that the workload of the Arctic Council is increasing. It is necessary to continue to consider ways and means to improve the operations of the Arctic Council. During the chairmanship work will therefore continue to consolidate the structure of the Arctic Council in order to enable it to respond to new challenges. In this process, the unique contribution by indigenous peoples through their Permanent Participants status must be safeguarded and further strengthened.

During the last year a number of reports, national position papers and international meetings have focused on the Arctic. It has been pointed out that climate change creates new policy challenges on many levels for the Arctic region as the sea ice melts and that there is a need to develop shared ideas for the future. Potential availability of oil, gas and minerals and future transport routes is seen to create economic opportunities that, if not managed environmentally soundly, might endanger and pollute the region. The policy challenges in regards to the Arctic calls, in the view of many, for regional and

international cooperation. At the same time, as more international focus and attention is directed towards the Arctic and the possibilities it present, it is of major importance for the Arctic Council to safeguard the inherent cultural, economic and political rights of the Arctic States and of the Peoples of the Arctic.

Arctic Council is the relevant regional body covering the Arctic, its nations and peoples and in order to respond to the increased interest for arctic matters the chairmanship will seek to highlight Arctic perspectives and concerns in the relevant international processes.

The increased international focus on Arctic issues has also inspired many other non-Arctic states and organisations to seek closer ties with the Council. Observers and ad hoc observers are assets, and the Arctic Council should look for ways to further involve those that are ready to cooperate under the premise that the primary role of the Arctic Council is to promote sustainable development for the Peoples of the Arctic and the Arctic States.