

Statement by Frank Belfrage, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Sweden, at the Arctic Council Meeting of Deputy Ministers, Copenhagen, 27 May 2010

”Responding to Emerging Challenges”

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for inviting us to this meeting. This is a new and timely feature in the dynamic evolution of the Arctic Council as a forum for dialogue and consultation on Arctic issues. It is a good idea to hold an AC meeting at the political level also in the years between our regular Meetings of Foreign Ministers.

You have given this session the title ”Responding to Emerging Challenges”. With that in mind, I would like to comment on some issues that I believe that we need to address. These are not necessarily new challenges, we have seen them coming for some time already. Rather, they are matters that need political attention and impulses so that we can use the opportunities we have and achieve maximum results from joint efforts.

Global warming continues. That is an obvious challenge. The effects remain uncertain and difficult to predict. We saw a minimum sea ice extent in the Arctic in September 2007 that was so low that it surprised even the scientists that work on a daily basis analyzing sea ice measurements. This winter, 2009/2010, we have, on the other hand, seen a very large sea ice extent with a starting date for the spring ice melt on 31 March - that is later than at any other time since satellite measurements began in 1979. One whole month later than "normal"! However, this month of May the sea ice seems to be melting very rapidly. It is obvious that we cannot know what to expect from year to year, from season to season.

This is a daunting challenge to policy makers. Uncertainty and unpredictability in the natural environment are significant factors that determine developments in the Arctic.

One clear lesson is that we must take into account what I would like to call the "uncertainty factor". We need to plan for what we can anticipate may well happen even if we do not know when, or for sure whether it really will happen.

The best way of doing that is of course to focus on prevention, preparedness and precaution. In the climate change context we talk about "adaptation".

That calls for a precautionary approach.

As regards **maritime shipping** in Arctic waters, we have two very important processes under way.

One is the negotiations at the IMO in London on a mandatory "Polar Code".

The other is our own AC negotiations on a legally binding instrument on "Search and Rescue".

1. The IMO negotiations are well prepared. Our experts have worked on the relevant issues for quite some time. We have had long deliberations in the context of the Arctic Council as well as in the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings on a wide range of issues relating to ship movements in Arctic and Antarctic waters. Last year's AC Ministerial Meeting received the "Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment", the AMSA report, that highlighted the issues at stake in a comprehensive way. Now is the time to deliver. Negotiations are ongoing in London. They are complex and there are many specific

aspects that need to be covered. It is important that we reach a substantial result. This is an opportunity that we cannot afford to miss. We must all of us give maximum political support to those very important IMO negotiations so that they result in a comprehensive and mandatory "Polar Code".

2. Our own AC Task Force on "Search and Rescue" has made a very good start. Sweden fully supports the aim of concluding the negotiations in time for the next AC Ministerial Meeting in the spring 2011. We will come back to the "TF SAR" as a specific agenda item this afternoon.

Mr. Chairman,

We need to continuously focus on Arctic science, also after the "International Polar Year" is over, - with an emphasis on monitoring and research. I concur with the points made by the USA on the important interface between science and policy making.

We also need to focus on Arctic societies - where and under what conditions people live and work.

This year, 2010, is the "International Biodiversity Year". All our governments have made commitments to preserve biodiversity. Loss of biodiversity is maybe the biggest threat of all to life on planet Earth.

The Arctic biodiversity is unique. The Arctic ecosystems are unique.

Organisms that need a cold environment have nowhere to go when the climate gets warmer. Global warming constitutes a real threat to those organisms. And to whole ecosystems that depend on such organisms.

The only way to meet that kind of challenge and to be able to preserve cold-dependant species seems to be to prevent further warming. Sweden is as committed to combating climate change as we were before COP 15. We continue to look for ways to move the international climate negotiations forward.

CO2 emissions must come down. Emissions of all green house gases must be reduced. The EU has put an ambitious programme on the table which we will come back to as we prepare for real progress at the COP 16 meeting in December in Cancun. Other substances that affect climate change must also

be controlled. Sweden was very pleased that the AC Ministerial Meeting last year decided to set up a Task Force on SLCFs. The scientific work on "short lived climate forcers" has attracted our attention from the very beginning. We therefore welcome that the AC has been able to pioneer multilateral work in this area. The issue has now also been put on the agenda of other international bodies. A lot of scientific uncertainty remains but that should not prevent us from taking action to reduce emissions of black carbon and other short lived climate forcing substances. This is an important air quality problem and a health problem as well. It will be interesting to see what our Task Force can achieve.

In this context, we have noted that one of the main uncertainties seems to relate to the lack of data for gas flaring. That is somewhat surprising. I would have thought that it would be fairly easy for the companies involved to collect data on the amounts of gas that they burn and of the composition of the emissions from such flaring. I want to take this opportunity to urge my colleagues in those Arctic States where gas flaring takes place to use their influence to encourage the companies concerned to release the relevant data and make them available to scientists so that we can get better estimates of

the effects of gas flaring and the quantities of black carbon emitted from such sources.

The heavy dependence of modern societies on fossil fuels is a major challenge in the Arctic context. There is an urgent need for alternative sources of energy that do not lead to net CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Many Arctic States experience mounting pressures to allow exploitation of more oil and gas deposits in the Arctic region. Such exploitation will no doubt contribute to growth and the creation of jobs. But on the other hand we have to focus on the risks associated with continued exploration for oil and gas in a part of the world where climate change could well lead to dramatic and irreversible effects on key ecosystems.

Oil and gas exploitation in the Arctic also carries other risks. As already pointed out by Canada, it is hard to imagine how we would be able to deal with a disaster like the one that is still going on in the Mexican Gulf if something similar were to happen in Arctic waters.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me finish by commending the Danish Chairmanship of the AC for its good work. We look forward to your second year at the head of the AC and hope that our joint efforts will pave the way for progress and for substantive decisions on outstanding issues at the Meeting of Foreign Ministers next year - including to institutionally strengthen the AC. Needless to say, you will thereby greatly facilitate our task as the next Chairmanship of the AC.

Thank you for your attention.



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