

Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting

Iqaluit April 24, 2015

Statement by Iceland

Distinguished Ministers, Permanent Participants, other members of the Arctic Council and observers. It is a privilege to visit Iqaluit and experience first-hand Canada's high North as we conclude the Canadian Chairmanship.

I would like to thank our host, Minister Leona Aglukkaq and her team for their commitment, dedication and leadership during the chairmanship.

Madam Chair,

As we look back on the progress and our accomplishments, we can proudly celebrate our achievements here today. The Canadian chairmanship program has been both ambitious and pragmatic. Under the theme "Development for the People of the North" the focus has been on Arctic communities and improving the lives of our people, by addressing health and mental wellness, economic and social development as well as environmental issues.

These are all important issues for the people of the Arctic and the Circumpolar region as a whole. The ability to channel the priorities of the Chairmanship through the Council's efficient working groups, coupled with the strong support from the Secretariat is a valuable asset for our work and one of the Council's main strengths.

Iceland has participated actively in the work of the Arctic Council during the Canadian chairmanship, putting special emphasis on human capital, our most valuable resource. We co-led two projects that focused on the people of the Arctic and their living conditions, the second Arctic Human Development Report and the project on Gender Equality in the Arctic. Equal participation of women and men in all spheres of society is key to secure social well-being and sustainable development in the region. I call on all of us to ensure that gender equality becomes a part of our work on a more permanent basis.

Our accomplishments, documented in the Iqaluit Declaration are only the top of the iceberg with regard to the extensive work done by the Council's working groups and task forces. We thank all those participating in this important work for their commitment and contribution. I

also want to express our appreciation to the Secretariat for their invaluable support and efficient operation,

We also welcome the significant steps taken towards strengthening the role and participation of the Permanent Participants.

Madam Chair,

Iceland places strong emphasis on the Arctic Council as the premier forum for Arctic cooperation, where the eight Arctic States share a common responsibility and a mutual interest in the protection and sustainability of the Arctic. It is underlined by our commitment that the Arctic is a region of peace, stability and cooperation. I believe the theme of the United States' chairmanship "One Arctic: Shared Opportunities, Challenges and Responsibilities," captures well our common vision.

Iceland is fully committed to continue its active and constructive participation in our joint work during the U.S. chairmanship.

The marine environment is of crucial importance to Iceland. Our life has been based on sustainable and responsible use of living marine resources. We have always placed high importance on international and regional cooperation in oceans affairs, with sound science as its foundation. Therefore, Iceland welcomes the U.S. chairmanship's initiative on Arctic Marine Cooperation and will participate actively. That work could draw on the extensive scientific work already done on marine issues by the Arctic Council's working groups.

The Council has an active role in safeguarding environmental and civil security in the Arctic and Iceland attaches great importance on strengthening further practical international cooperation and regional search and rescue capability and oil spill response capacity.

Climate change is the single most important driving force behind change in the Arctic. As we move towards developing a new international climate change agreement, it is important that we demonstrate leadership in addressing the cause of Arctic warming and work together to ensure an effective and ambitious international climate Agreement in Paris by the end of this year.

The continued focus that we will put on improving economic and living conditions in the region is welcomed and we will contribute, by sharing our knowledge, expertise and best practices, including in the area of renewable energy and telecommunication.

As regards economic development, we must strike a balance between conservation and utilization.

The newly established Arctic Economic Council will be a valuable partner in facilitating and fostering business opportunities to stimulate investments and employment opportunities, while advancing responsible economic development in the region. The people of the Arctic and their communities must benefit from economic activities, while sustainability and sound management of resources remains central in our considerations.

Dear colleagues,

As we set the stage for the second round of chairmanships, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Arctic Council next year, it is important that we take stock based on our past experiences and discuss ways to enhance our cooperation with our shared interest as the guiding principle. Thus defining where we can build on existing strengths and where added capacity is needed.

The Council has matured and evolved in the past few years, into a body that rightly benefits from active contribution from observers. Iceland welcomes the Council's engagement with observers that strengthens our ability to address some of the key challenges in Arctic.

Let me conclude by thanking Minister Aglukkaq and her team for all the hard work during the last two years and wishing the incoming chair, Secretary Kerry and his team, all the best during your Chairmanship.

Thank you.