

Dear colleagues,

It is with the greatest pleasure I welcome you all to the great Arctic city of Kiruna and to the Arctic Council ministerial meeting.

Or to Giron, which is the Sami name for Kiruna.

This is the eighth Arctic Council ministerial meeting - and we are rounding up the first cycle of chairmanship.

It is with great pleasure that I will soon hand over to Leona and to Canada - to where it all started.

These have been two challenging and important years.

We have seen the Arctic issues and our region coming more and more in global focus.

What we do as we move our cooperation forward is important also to the world.

But what the rest of the world does is also tremendously important to us.

Global warming is happening. And it happening twice as fast up here in our Arctic as in the rest of the world.

From Kiruna I appeal to all nations to do more limit the emission of greenhouse gases. It's imperative for the future of our planet, for the future of our children and grandchildren.

Let that message from all of us here in Kiruna be loud and clear.

We are committed to do whatever we can to protect the fragile Arctic environment.

One important step is the agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution that we have negotiated and will be signing here.

In addition, we have managed to develop common guidelines for the prevention of possible oil emissions in the Arctic.

It's not the solution to everything. But it is an important step.

And our Minister of Environment Lena Ek will soon outline other results out of the meeting between Arctic environment ministers here a couple of months ago.

Sweden has helped raise the profile of Arctic issues in international fora with a view to achieving more ambitious global emissions reductions.

The Arctic is first and foremost a home to the people who live here.

Positive economic development is a core issue for the people.

The Arctic Council has during Swedish chairmanship done some ground-breaking work in initiating a discussion, in cooperation with the business community, on how the private sector can contribute to sustainable economic development in the Arctic region.

It has been important for us to strengthen the Arctic Council's communication with the purpose of improving the quality of the public debate on the important work that the Arctic Council is involved in.

The Danish chairmanship started an ambitious work to strengthen the Arctic Council.

We have lived up to the tight time-line and established the Secretariat in Tromsø, Norway, established a budget, revised the Rules of Procedure where necessary and published an Observer manual.

We have strengthened the focus on concrete outcomes of our work and implementation of what is decided.

Obviously there is a range of possible future scenarios for the Arctic development.

As I stated earlier, the changing climate also creates new opportunities, not least for the Arctic states.

These, however, are also fraught with new challenges, and threats that must be confronted.

In short, our policy is that the key to success is through international cooperation – whether dealing with the many risks associated with a changing Arctic or the various new economic opportunities.

In this respect, we place strong emphasis on the future role of the Arctic Council.

I think it finally has come of age, it is mature, and is developing the self-confidence necessary to stimulate global approach to the most urgent problems in the region and to build bridges of cooperation to outside stakeholders.

This should be the guiding principle for the Council to keep its relevance and leadership as the main forum for Arctic cooperation.

We must work together. We should allow ourselves the luxury to have frank discussions that focus on minimizing our differences and maximizing our shared interests.

After this fruitful first round of Arctic Council chairmanships, we are looking forward to the adoption of the “Vision for the Arctic”.

It is a short and highly political statement on how the Arctic States and indigenous groups would like to see the future of the Arctic.

Expressing our plans and hopes for the Arctic will be an important mark to commemorate the successful past and bright future of the Arctic Council.

Again, I am very thankful to all of you for joining us and the brilliant work of everyone engaged in all the different activities of the Council.

Thank you.