

Speech

Arctic Council Ministerial meeting

Tromsø, 29 April 2009

Ms Hill-Marta Solberg

Chair of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region

Chair, Ministers, dear Arctic friends,

The Arctic is undergoing an unprecedented transformation, and everything is happening at a greater speed than anyone dared to predict a few years ago. The sea ice in the Arctic is melting faster than estimated. The marine activity in Arctic waters is increasing dramatically and the tankers and the cruise ships have entered the Arctic. The harvesting of the rich natural resources in the Arctic will continue to develop.

I'm honoured to represent the Arctic parliamentarians at this important meeting at a defining moment for the region. The interest in Arctic issues in our own countries has never been higher. The business community, the media, politicians and organisations are all looking north.

The international community is looking to the Arctic as a global barometer for climate change. The polar bear and the Arctic indigenous peoples have given climate change a face.

Ministers, we are about to enter the time of the Arctic.

In the time of the Arctic, biannual ministerial meetings in the Arctic Council are no longer sufficient. The changes are too big and are happening too fast.

I have a clear message from the Arctic parliamentarians: the Arctic Council ministerial meetings must take place on a yearly basis.

To meet the increased interest in the Arctic, the Arctic Council needs greater political involvement and leadership. Annual ministerial meetings will reflect and meet the current interest in the region. Annual meetings will help retain and further develop the Arctic Council as the main arena for political debate on Arctic issues.

I am happy to learn that the Arctic Council will get increased political leadership, as announced by Foreign Minister Støre earlier in this meeting.

Friends,

We are obliged to make the greatest possible use of the Arctic Council. It is a wonderful and unique instrument of international cooperation. A body where scientists, indigenous peoples and politicians meet to find the best solutions. A political organisation ready to listen to and involve countries outside the region. One that treats organisations, with a deep and sincere interest in the future of the Arctic, seriously.

The partnership between indigenous peoples, scientists and politicians is the foundation on which we must base how we deal with future challenges in the Arctic.

I would like to congratulate Norway on a successful Chairmanship and wish the incoming Danish Chair the very best of luck.

Thank you for your attention.