

Arctic Passion, Aker Arctic, Helsinki, 5 March 2009

Opening Words by Mr. Pekka Huhtaniemi, Under-Secretary of State,
Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, to address such a prominent gathering of Arctic experts.

The Arctic has been getting more and more media attention over the past months. One might say the media is afflicted by a serious case of Arctic fever, if not passion. For us living here in an Arctic country, the increased attention is both good news and potentially bad news. The good news is the growing global awareness of the climate change, and how it is affecting the Arctic much faster than other parts of our globe. The potential bad news is that the growing exploitation of energy and other natural resources may ignore the vulnerability of the Arctic environment.

The recent conclusions by the Council of the European Union on the EU's Arctic policies state: *"The European Union should aim at preserving the Arctic in unison with its population and address Arctic challenges in a systematic and coordinated manner in areas such as environment, biodiversity, climate change, chemicals, maritime affairs, energy, research and observation, fisheries and transport, as well as the protection of the livelihood of indigenous populations."*

The principle expressed is very simple: Exploitation and protection must take place hand-in-hand. Exploitation of non-living resources must not endanger the sustainability of living resources. Many of us present here today are passionate about the Arctic because we live here. The key stake-holders, therefore, are the Arctic states, which are all members of the Arctic Council, together with the indigenous peoples, represented by the six Permanent Participants in the Council. The Arctic Council is the only circumpolar cooperation arrangement in the Arctic, and therefore it occupies a unique position in regard to the Arctic issues.

The Arctic states, as well as the Arctic Council, welcome the interest of non-Arctic states and other actors. We look forward to them joining in the work for the sustainable development of the region and its population. The Arctic Council has many observers which provide valuable input and resources to the research and other activities within the Council. At the same time, they help the voice of the Arctic to be heard louder and clearer. Many states and organizations from outside the Arctic have proven themselves to be just as passionate about the Arctic as we are.

The five states which have made claims on the continental shelf of the Arctic seas have jointly committed themselves into following the existing international framework of rules, above all the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. There are other relevant treaties as well. Cooperation holds much more promise for the future than rivalry. In the harsh climatic conditions of the Arctic, many economic and other ventures require large investment and support infrastructure that is difficult for any one state alone to provide.

Finland is not in a position to make any claims on the continental shelf, but as an Arctic state we are naturally interested in participating in the sustainable exploitation of the natural resources of the Arctic region. Finland has accumulated a wide range of Arctic know-how. We have experts - in research institutions and businesses alike - in such fields as offshore technologies, maritime transport, Arctic construction, renewable energy and waste management, just to mention a few examples. Naturally for Finland, forestry has always been one of the cornerstones of our livelihood. Sustainable tourism, reindeer husbandry and related activities are also areas where Finland has long traditions. In Arctic research Finland is in the forefront.

Today's host serves as a prime example of highly specialized, Arctic know-how that Finland has to offer. Know-how of maritime transport and offshore operations in Arctic conditions is a cornerstone of our economy. Without the passion to learn more about the Arctic and to develop better ways to deal with Arctic conditions we wouldn't be the leading nation in Arctic maritime technology today that we are.

Alongside the United States and Canada, Finland is a lead country in the Arctic Council's Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment. This assessment will provide a timely and comprehensive presentation of the current and future developments regarding Arctic shipping. As we all know,

Arctic ecosystems are extremely vulnerable while the resources and technologies available for the prevention of natural disasters are lagging behind. Search and rescue operations are demanding because of natural conditions and large distances. Therefore, the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment will be a major deliverable at the next Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting to be held in Tromsø at the end of April this year. We look forward to adopting a series of important recommendations to improve the safety of maritime transport and environmental protection in the Arctic seas. It is our hope that you, as the leading operators in your respective fields, will support these joint efforts for more binding safety and environmental measures in relevant international fora, such as the International Maritime Organization.

Another example of the Arctic Council's work relevant to this forum is the updating of the Arctic Offshore Oil and Gas Guidelines. The Guidelines recommend voluntary standards, technical and environmental best practices, management policy, and regulatory controls for Arctic offshore oil and gas operations. The updated guidelines are also to be endorsed by the Ministerial Meeting in April.

Today's event will provide for an excellent opportunity for those present to exchange knowledge and views about all of these issues, and others. I thank the organizer -- Aker Arctic -- for their timely contribution. I am sure that at the end of the day you will all feel even more passionate about the Arctic than you already do.

Thank you for your attention. I wish you all a successful seminar.