



CONFERENCE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE ARCTIC  
REGION

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE  
ARCTIC REGION

11th Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region  
Whitehorse 9-11 September 2014

**Keynote address by Ms Sara Olsvig**

Chair of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region

Mr Chair, colleagues, distinguished guests and friends,

I thank you all for participating in the 11<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region here in Whitehorse. Thank you for coming to discuss how we together can contribute to a prosperous Arctic, where children can grow up and live good, safe and healthy lives. An Arctic where development goes hand in hand with cultural integrity, protection of the environment and social welfare. An Arctic where we focus on what we have in common and how we together meet the challenges ahead of us. An Arctic, where we put people first, develop our region with a human rights approach.

I want to convey a special thanks to the Canadian parliament and for organizing the Conference in the beautiful territory of Yukon, and to my colleague Ryan Leef for welcoming us to his amazing home town – Whitehorse.

As the chair of the Standing Committee it is my privilege to be able to address you at this 11<sup>th</sup> Arctic Parliamentary Conference. In my intervention I will update you and reflect on the activities of the Standing Committee since the last Arctic Parliamentary conference in 2012.

After the Conference held in Iceland in 2012, the Standing Committee elected Mr Morten Høglund as Chair, a position he continued to have until he retired from parliament in the fall 2013, and I was elected new Chair of the Committee. I want to compliment the leadership of Mr Høglund and thank him for his able contribution to the Arctic cooperation.

Dear colleagues,

In the two years which has passed since our last conference, the Arctic development is continuing along the same path as we have witnessed the recent years. Less sea ice and more extreme weather are among the results of the climate changes that are challenging us in many ways.

The Arctic continues to attract global attention. Rich natural resources are becoming more accessible as the ice is melting. The melting ice leads to increasingly more marine activity increasingly further north. This development makes the need for Arctic cooperation and good, sensible governance of the Arctic, of vital importance. The Arctic Council is the most important collaborative body to achieve this.

I want to state clearly, that the most valuable resource we have in the Arctic is its people. This summer, I visited a number of small settlements along the West coast of Greenland. In Iginniarfik, settlement with less than 100 inhabitants, I visited the school. A wonderful, well kept building with all modern tools and equipment you could wish for. It was clear that the inhabitants take good care of their school and their children. I understood why children from smaller settlements on average get a higher education than their parents, than children in bigger towns, and I understood why these children also on average get higher grades in mathematics and the Greenlandic language. People in Iginniarfik and in all other small settlements in the Arctic do not have the same goods and privileged as we who live in large towns have, and although social challenges are part of everyday life, so is the will to take care and educate the children of the settlements.

Another important fact from Greenland, is that people in smaller settlements on average have more children than us in the large town. An essential fact when the overall population of Greenland is declining.

I believe that many of the social and educational challenges we see in Greenland are similar to those in other parts of the Arctic. My message to you today is that we have an urgent need to collaborate and focus on education and welfare. The educational and social inequality in the Arctic is high, and it is our common responsibility to act on that inequality.

I also believe that we must constantly re-evaluate how we define development, and in particular sustainable development. Of course development of the Arctic must happen with its people in focus, and sustainable development must be a development that contributes to the wellbeing of the Arctic peoples.

At the Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in Kiruna in May last year important decisions for the future Arctic cooperation was made.

A second legally binding agreement was signed between the members on marine oil spill preparedness and response. From the parliamentary side we have encouraged our governments to continue to utilize this instrument and find new areas for binding agreements in the Arctic, including an increased collaboration on education.

I am glad to see that the Arctic Council has established task forces to look at how the cooperation can be improved in areas such as science and oil spill prevention. We must continue to advocate for collaboration on other areas as well.

At the Ministerial Meeting in Kiruna a large group of new states were accepted as observers to the Arctic Council. I will return to this important decision later in my speech.

And finally, in Kiruna we were presented to excellent environmental assessments on for instance Arctic Biodiversity and Ocean Acidification, presenting new ground breaking in their respective fields.

Fellow parliamentarians,

At the meetings of the Standing Committee we address many of the same issues. At the meeting of the Standing Committee in June, we touched upon the issue of the need for development of a wider range of industries in the Arctic.

In Greenland, we currently have similar discussions. When debating this, I continuously highlight my strong believe, that we will gain more stable and

sustainable economies, if we widen our focus and seek to develop other industries than just minerals, oil and gas. Over time, our fish stocks have changed, and they will continue to do so in the future. Due to this fact, we must enhance our cooperation in regards to fisheries, research and management across the Arctic. The Arctic Council must also increase its focus on fisheries. We must think and plan ahead. Not only Arctic fishing companies will fish for the resources in the Arctic Oceans. Also European, Asian and others will most likely find their way into the increasingly open Arctic Ocean and search for living resources.

Like in other fora, we have also been continuously debating the issue of the EU seal product ban. At our last conference in 2012, we specifically recommended Arctic states to “consider the impacts of bans of products of some living resources on indigenous Arctic communities”. Unfortunately, there is still a lot of work to be done regarding this issue. Together, our main message across the Arctic is clear: We, the peoples of the Arctic, must be able to live and benefit from living resources, and we, just as other peoples around the world, must be able to export our resources, of course when managed in a sustainable manner.

In my view, the issue of the seal product ban is not just a Canadian issue, or a Greenlandic issue. It is an Arctic issue, which must be addressed and fought collectively. We must maintain a strong voice in the protection of our rights to develop the use of our living resources.

Dear colleagues,

There can be many other industries to develop. The Arctic is diverse, our societies are diverse. We need to diversify our Arctic businesses in order to foster a broad spectrum of possibilities for our future generations.

I therefore believe it is time to address Arctic innovation beyond the development of natural resources. What will the people living in the Arctic live from in addition to its rich resources? How do we stimulate innovation which addresses the needs of future Arctic societies?

Innovation in the Arctic should be an increasingly important area of Arctic cooperation, where we aim at establishing a system that links the science community, the business sector and the political society with local societies and peoples.

I believe it was a good start when Sweden during its Chairmanship of the Arctic Council initiated a closer dialogue with the business sector with focus on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the Arctic. Canada has continued this process during its Chairmanship. The newly established Arctic Economic Council must play a constructive role in facilitating a better dialogue between the business sector and the Arctic political cooperation. The Arctic Economic Council must also see it as its responsibility to speak to diversified Arctic business sectors. We cannot put all of our eggs in one basket.

We will have the opportunity to discuss this topic in further detail tomorrow.

Dear colleagues,

In the Standing Committee we have followed the development of shipping in the Arctic. At our meeting in Murmansk last September we were informed about the building of new infrastructure along the Russian Northern Coastline to improve the safety for ships using the Northern Sea Route.

With the increase in activity in the Arctic we need to develop infrastructure in the region. This is to improve the safety for the people working, visiting or living in the Arctic, but also to protect the environment. With the sparse

population, challenging climate conditions and long distances we must also realize that the infrastructure will never reach the level of other areas further south. So what does sustainable infrastructure development in the Arctic really mean? It is not just about being able to travel physically from A to B. It is also about building communications infrastructure, to make sure, that for example children in small settlements also have internet access and so that telecommunication can be used safely in the health sector and improve living conditions for Arctic peoples. I look forward to debate this with you after this opening session.

Colleagues,

A close dialogue with the Arctic Council is very important for the work of the Standing Committee. We need to be up to date on the activities of the Arctic Council to know where we best can give our recommendations to the future direction of the Council. We depend upon a close dialogue to be able to promote the results from our conferences like this one in Whitehorse.

In February the Standing Committee met with Minister Aglukkaq and I appreciated the report by the minister, and especially the open discussion afterwards. I would like to acknowledge the great job Minister Aglukkaq is doing as Chair of the Arctic Council. Her passion for the people and the environment in the North and your determination to get results for a better Arctic is unquestionable. Therefore, it is unfortunate that Minister Aglukkaq is not together with us at our conference. The Arctic parliamentary conferences have been important venues for dialog and discussion between the governmental cooperation in the Arctic Council and the parliamentarians. It will be important for the Standing Committee and for all of us to find a way to convey the message from this conference to our governments and the Arctic Council.

I want to congratulate Minister Leona Aglukkaq and Canada on the exiting news about the Franklin expedition findings.

It is imperative that the Arctic parliamentary cooperation still has close contacts with the Arctic Council. As parliamentarians we have a special role to play in the Arctic cooperation, as the Arctic peoples' representatives.

As the number of observers in the Arctic Council increase it is essential to remember that we, as elected representatives in the Arctic countries, are not just like any other observer organisation or observer state. Having said this, I understand that the new observers to the Arctic Council represent challenges to the governance structure. The main actors in the Arctic Council cooperation must and shall be the Arctic states and the Permanent Participants. At the same time the observers represent opportunities to improve the governance of the Arctic. The science and knowledge about the Arctic is very advanced in many of the observer states and organisations, and is of use to the work of the Arctic Council. Sharing knowledge about the work of the Arctic Council and the fact that many of the main challenges in the Arctic derives from outside of the region, are other important factors.

It is my opinion, that we as parliamentarians must address the issue of the growing number of observers in the Arctic Council. Observer bodies that represent Arctic peoples, or have deep roots in the Arctic Council work, should be allowed to maintain a central role in relevant meetings of the Arctic Council.

Dear colleagues,

On a final note, I would like to stress the importance of maintaining a strong cooperation for peace and stability in the Arctic. We are currently experiencing



challenging times for international cooperation in many parts of the world. The eight Arctic nation states are eight very different states. Smaller Nordic states interact with large countries, and we do not have to look many decades back to see what challenges we faced when we were not able to freely collaborate across our borders.

Today, we see how all eight Arctic States come together on an equal basis in the Arctic Council. Furthermore, the Council has since its beginning had Indigenous Peoples' Organizations as central actors, sitting side by side with the state representatives. This important structure, which includes both the states and the Permanent Participants, make up the core of the Arctic Council.

Every day the World around us changes. The Arctic is an integrated part of this World, thus we are also constantly faced with challenges that go beyond our Arctic borders. But we should not bring conflicts from other parts of the World into the Arctic cooperation. As far as possible we must protect the relationship we have built among our Arctic peoples and states. This relationship is invaluable and must be cared for politically. We need to think smart, not just for the benefit of our own states, but as a collective Arctic.

Thank you for your attention.

Qujanaq.