

Mr. Chair, ambassadors, colleagues and friends of the Arctic,

The Arctic region is unique in many ways, and so is the Arctic cooperation.

The Arctic region is in some ways characterized by contrasts. The darkness in wintertime, and the light in the summer. The Aurora Borealis and the midnight sun. Thriving cities with economic growth and strong universities, and isolated rural off-grid communities with big social problems and huge natural resources.

The Arctic is a place with extreme distances and few people, and it is the the region where the effects of global warming are seen first. In the whole of the Arctic we can witness the melting of the sea ice and glaciers, the thawing tundra and change in weather patterns with stronger and more frequent storms.

But for me, and I think for all of us who are gathered here in Ulan-Ude, the arctic cooperation is first and foremost about creating good lives and opportunities for the people living in the Arctic.

The Arctic cooperation reflects the uniqueness of region in a good way. In a few years the Arctic Council has developed into an international regional organization characterized by peaceful and constructive members, innovative governance and involvement of the indigenous peoples living in the Arctic.

Both the Arctic region and Arctic cooperation are experiencing increasing global attention.

The Arctic parliamentary cooperation wants to play contribute and give direction to how we want to develop our future Arctic. In this process this conference in Ulan-Ude plays an important part. We meet and discuss the current challenges and how we best shall move forward to ensure a sustainable and positive development for the Arctic and its peoples.

I want to convey a special thanks to the Russian parliament for organizing the Conference in the unique Republic of Burjatia and the truly amazing city Ulan-Ude. A special thanks to my good colleague Mr. Michael Slipenchuk for welcoming us to your home town and introducing us to this part of Russia.

I was elected as Chair of the Standing Committee after the last Arctic parliamentary conference in Whitehorse, Canada in 2014, and I want to share with you some of activities of the Committee over the last two years.

The mandate for the work in the Committee has been the Conference Statement adopted in Whitehorse. The statement had three main headlines:

- Economic development and capacity building.
- Arctic governance
- Environmental challenges

These three headlines have been instrumental in the work for me as Chair and for the Committee. Let me briefly say a few words about each of them.

Economic development and capacity building are keys to allow Arctic communities to prosper and develop. People living in the Arctic must be fully involved in the new economic opportunities arising, and the business

development in the Arctic. The people living in the North must also be allowed to make use of the opportunities in their region –just as people elsewhere in the world. Harvesting of the natural resources, be it marine mammals, fisheries or mineral resources, are important for the local economies.

To ensure that local communities will benefit from economic development, capacity building, particularly through education, is decisive. It is, however, vital that capacity development is rooted in, and relevant for, the people living in the Region, and that there is a link between the economic opportunities and the education system. As Arctic parliamentarians we encourage and support stronger Arctic cooperation in education. We need to find ways to further stimulate Arctic student exchange and continue to learn from each other. The University of the Arctic is a good instrument to achieve this goal.

That is also why we ask the governments in the Arctic countries to *“Create an Arctic Circumpolar Mobility Program to encourage the mobility of students as well as scientists among the Arctic Council member states and observers.”* The aim is to ensure better mutual understanding, collaboration, innovation and sustainable economic development.

Dear colleagues,

Arctic governance has been a topic which the Arctic parliamentarians have been discussing for many years. How can we continue to develop the Arctic cooperation to meet the challenges and opportunities in the region?

I will introduce you to two aspects:

The first is how the Arctic cooperation can develop and strengthen its economic agenda.

Since our last conference in Whitehorse the Arctic Economic Council has been established and set up a secretariat in Tromsø, Norway. From the Arctic parliamentarians' side we have established good contacts with representatives of the Arctic Economic Council and its Chair Ms. Tara Sweeney, and we co-hosted the "Arctic Economic Development Forum" in Washington D.C. in the beginning of April 2016.

The UN and other forums have focused on the interplay between business development and human rights, resulting in initiatives such as the UN Global Impact. January this year an "Arctic Investment Protocol" was presented by the World Economic forum. I believe governments and businesses operating in the Arctic should use these existing international CSR guidelines and find ways to implement them in the Arctic.

In my view, CSR is fundamentally linked to the concept of sustainable development: businesses must integrate the economic, social and environmental impact in their operations. It should be a platform for dialogue between the business sector, governments and local residents. In the Arctic, the indigenous peoples will need to be one of the partners in this process. The Standing Committee will continue the dialogue with the Arctic Council and representatives of the business sector to look into how we can cooperate to develop a business sector which benefits the people living in the Arctic, as well as the national economies.

The second aspect is how we can strengthen the voices of Arctic residents in the Arctic Council cooperation, both for non-indigenous people and indigenous people.

The last years we have seen an influx of new observers and observer applications in the Arctic Council, with many new nations joining as observers in 2013. The Arctic parliamentarians have been strongly in favor including new observers, as long as they commit themselves to respect the criteria set by the Council, as we believe they can bring significant scientific, financial and other contributions to the Arctic Council.

However, the inclusion of new observers must not diminish the role of the indigenous peoples in their capacity as permanent participants in the Arctic Council. Nor must the role of the organizations representing people living in the Arctic be sidelined. This is the backdrop for the proposal to include more voices from the peoples living in the Arctic, such as regional organizations, into the work of the Arctic Council to make sure that they can influence the direction of the Arctic cooperation.

My fellow parliamentarians,

Environmental protection, and especially climate change, has been prominent on the Arctic agenda for many years. Last year much of this was related to the build up to the climate conference in Paris in December. For us as Arctic parliamentarians the most important message to the global community was how climate change is changing the Arctic and the urgent need of an

international agreement to reduce the CO2 emissions. I believe the agreement reached in Paris was the most important Arctic agreement last year.

We who are living in the Arctic will be hit first and hardest of the consequences of the climate changes. If the global temperature rises with 2 degrees Celsius on average, we will see changes around 4 degrees in the Arctic. And the changes will come to us first.

And the changes have already started. In Alaska erosion is threatening settlements, the ice cap is at an all-time low and fish stocks are migrating. But let me emphasize: the global climate changes aren't created in the Arctic and by the 4 million people living there. It is created globally and is the sum of the activities of all 7 billion people living on the planet. Therefore we cannot solve the problem by only limit economic and human activities in the Arctic. The climate changes are a global responsibility, which requires global solutions.

We have also looked at how Arctic inhabitants can prepare for the changing climate. How can we build resilient Arctic communities and what are the important factors in building resilience towards a changing climate?

Furthermore we have looked at adaptation to climate change. There are interesting projects and important work on resilience and adaptation being finalized in the run up to the Arctic Ministerial meeting in May next year.

Much of this work should be continued and implemented. The next step, in my view, is how the Arctic cooperation better can include the observers to the Arctic Council in the work to reduce CO2 and black carbon. Let me remind you

that the member nations and observer nations to the Arctic Council stands for more than 2/3 of the global emissions.

Colleagues,

As we have heard, the Arctic Council celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. The Arctic parliamentarians congratulate the Arctic Council with the anniversary and its many important achievements.

As Arctic parliamentarians we appreciate the good dialogue we have with the Arctic Council representatives at our meetings. We look forward to continued cooperation and aim to be a constructive partner, both as an observer to the Arctic Council, and as a partner in making sure the Arctic is governed to the benefit of the Arctic peoples and our nations.

The Arctic Council has in my opinion been a success in the twenty year it has existed. First and foremost I think this is due to the ability to change and come up with innovative ways to organize the work, to meet the challenges of the time. The 20th anniversary is also an opportunity to reflect upon how the Arctic cooperation will develop the next twenty years.

I think there are three main challenges the Arctic council has to face in the coming years:

- 1) We have to strengthen the influence of the people living in the Arctic in how to develop the Arctic region.
- 2) Find ways to close the social, economic and educational gaps between north and south. The opportunities in the north must benefit the people living there.

3) Use the Arctic cooperation to set a global agenda which address the challenges in the arctic, such as consequences of the climate changes and plastic threat in the oceans.

Because, the arctic cooperation is first and foremost about creating good lives and opportunities for the people living in the Arctic.