

Political statement by Foreign Minister Per Stig Møller at the COP-15 side-event
14.12.2009 on "Greenland Ice Sheet - Melting snow and Ice: Calls for Action"

Former Vice President Gore, Foreign Minister Støre, Prime Minister Kleist,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel very privileged to be here today in two capacities. In my capacity as Foreign Minister of Denmark and in my capacity as chairman of the Arctic Council. The topic for our meeting today is placed very high on my agenda in both of these capacities. I take it that Denmark is not new to you, in fact it is considered to be the oldest kingdom in the world, but you might require an introduction to the Arctic Council. Since the Arctic Council has also taking the initiative to this side-event to the climate conference, I believe a quick word of introduction is in order.

The members of the Arctic Council are the Arctic States, which comprise the five Nordic countries, Canada, Russia and the United States as well as the organizations representing the indigenous peoples in the Arctic area; it is not a decision-making, but a decision-shaping body, and it shapes decisions by way of consensus.

Despite the consensus nature of the Arctic Council, it has delivered a long line of important results in its short existence. From Denmark's point of view, the Council constitutes a unique and vital international forum that will be even more important in the future, because of the challenge from climate change.

The core of the Council's work is protection and development of the Arctic regions. Its work is based on science and knowledge collected and assessed by the Council's working groups. They call on scientists and other experts to produce reports that can serve as a basis for sound political decisions regarding the development of the Arctic area. Decisions that are taken by the Arctic states, the Arctic communities and international organizations.

Let me give you a good example of the Council's work that is highly relevant for the climate conference as well as for this side-event. A first estimate of the expected effects of climate change in the Arctic was presented in 2004 and 2005 in a report assessing the impact of climate change on the Arctic. This report opened the eyes of the world to the consequences of an Arctic meltdown and underlined the need for further work in order to reduce the region's vulnerability vis-à-vis the warming temperatures.

What we just heard from Professor Dorthe Dahl-Jensen was the update to this original report. It is fair to say that the update paints a gloomy picture of how the ice sheet is out of balance, and of the consequences stemming from a

melting Greenland. It carries the clear message from the scientific community that we need to act and that we need to act now.

The report shows us that the challenges are immense, and that global warming is taking place in the Arctic region twice as fast as observed elsewhere in the world. The ice is melting much faster than presumed only a few years ago.

Let me give you a few numbers to illustrate the urgency of the problem. In 2007, a staggering 240 cubic kilometres of ice was lost from the inland ice in Greenland, and new studies from 2008 and 2009 suggest even higher losses. The accelerated loss of ice, not only from the Greenland ice sheet, but also from other land based ice, influence the estimates for the rising sea levels globally. Recent models project a rise of about 1 meter during this century. It is not difficult to imagine the consequences, if global warming continues at this pace. We will face rising sea levels that will eradicate low level nation states and have serious security implications around the world. Imagine the impact from rising sea levels on the Netherlands, Bangladesh or the small island states in the Pacific.

Vulnerable ecosystems in the Arctic are also threatened. Traditional hunting and fishing is threatened as sea mammals and fish change their patterns of migration. The essential wildlife resources necessary to sustain human life in the Arctic are changing their location because of climate change. This will put the living conditions of 4 million Arctic inhabitants directly at risk. We know

all this already! We just don't know yet how serious the consequences will be. And we don't know when the consequences will be of such magnitude that they will seriously threaten the fragile communities in the Arctic.

The challenge of climate change is a global challenge, and we must act in a concerted and joint manner in order to combat this challenge.

A lot of regions around the world will require attention from the international community in order to prevent that new security threats stemming from a changing climate do not evolve into violent conflicts. But let me also say right away that we do not expect violent conflicts to erupt in the Arctic area. Many think that the new access to resources (oil and gas and minerals) and the possibilities for new sea-routes might give reason for conflicts. I'll come back to that in a second – but I am convinced that the Arctic will remain a region characterized by close international cooperation and the absence of conflict. Why? Because we foresaw the potential possibility for disagreement and we acted in May 2008 upon this. The 5 polar states – USA, Russia, Canada, Norway and Denmark/Greenland meet in Greenland and signed up to the Ilullissat declaration, in which we pledge to solve any problems between us by peaceful means. Personally, I will do my utmost as foreign minister and chairman of the Arctic Council to ensure that this will remain the case also in the future.

I have now highlighted the challenges and risks involved for the Arctic region in relation to climate change, but let me point out that there are also opportunities. Yes, there is an upside to climate change for this particular area!

The melting sea ice in the Arctic has given rise to hopes of huge economic benefits from the exploitation of natural resources, minerals, oil and gas. It has been estimated that 25 % of the world's undiscovered oil and gas reserves are to be found below the Arctic Ocean and only 3 % outside the areas belonging to the Arctic States. Furthermore, the melting sea ice will open up new shipping routes that will enable ships to sail north of the American and the Eurasian continents in the future. I know that we touch here on matters of vital interest for the world outside the Arctic. And let me underline here today that we - the Arctic nations - will be mindful of this huge responsibility. The outside world has valid interests with regard to the future of the Arctic, and we will, of course, not ignore these interests. The new possibilities must be used sustainably.

At the same time, we must not forget that the Arctic is inhabited by people, whose livelihood will be severely impacted by climate change. For one thing – the polar bear will disappear. This and other things calls for adaptation to the changing circumstances. The problem is, however, that we do not yet know how and at what rate changes will appear. But changes will come and adaptation to these changes will be required. So much we know! Our constant focus in this connection, nationally as well as internationally, will be on the

human dimension of Arctic development and how future changes will affect the lives of people in the North.

We not only need immediate action to address the problem of melting ice in the Arctic. We need wise and bold action as well.

Against this background, I firmly believe that time has come to launch a green growth path also for the Arctic area. A path that can combine economic growth and development as well as mitigate the impact of global warming. There is no contradiction here. On the contrary, the policies needed to develop and revitalize our economies are the same policies that can address climate change. Investing in green technologies and sustainable, affordable and reliable energy supplies will benefit the economy and employment as well as the climate. My own country has benefitted from such investments.

In the mid 1970's, Denmark was still suffering the consequences of the first oil crisis in 1973. Oil prices were skyrocketing, and our economy was highly dependent on imported oil and other fossil fuels. We realized that we had to lower our energy consumption and improve our energy efficiency.

By making some tough decisions back then, we subsequently managed to achieve this. We developed renewable energy sources and lessened our dependence on fossil fuels in the process. Today, 28 percent of our electricity comes from renewable sources. Since 1980 our economy has grown by 78 percent, while our energy consumption has remained more or less constant.

So, you see, it is possible!

Let me conclude by stating the obvious. Combating climate change is a common obligation and a common endeavour for all of us in the international community. It can foster economic growth, create more jobs, increase and diversify our energy supplies and through all this, improve our freedom of action not only nationally but also globally. Let me therefore end by quoting the Danish King, Frederik the 6th, who, when he reformed the agricultural policy in 1788 said: “Don’t postpone until tomorrow, what you can do today.”

Thank you for listening.