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OF THE ARCTIC REGION



PERMANENT MISSION OF NORWAY
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

The Arctic – A Barometer for Global Climate Change

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Trusteeship Council

Ice and snow are important components of the Earth's climate system. They are particularly sensitive to global warming. Since the 1980s glaciers worldwide have shrunk dramatically. Temperatures in the Arctic are increasing at almost double the global rate. The Arctic is a barometer for global Climate Change. The International Polar Year is expected to provide new and groundbreaking scientific knowledge. What are the challenges facing the Arctic? How can effective responses be developed? How does the region's population address current challenges?

Ms Annebeth Rosenboom will present the scope of the UN Annual Treaty Event 2008. She is the Chief of the Treaty Section, Office of Legal Affairs, UN.

Dr Robert Corell will address Climate Change from an Arctic perspective in a globalised world, and introduce the International Polar Year. He is the Director of the Global Change Program at the H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics and the Environment.

Ms Juliane Henningsen will introduce the role of the indigenous peoples in the Arctic cooperation, and reflect on climate change and its consequences for the Inuit People living in Greenland. She is a Danish Member of Parliament, representing Greenland.

Ms Darcie Matthiessen will introduce the role of the indigenous peoples in the Arctic cooperation. She is climate change coordinator at Arctic Athabaskan Council.

Dr Ahmed Djoghlaif will present how Arctic biodiversity is influenced by climate change. He is the Executive Secretary of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

Speech - Climate Change in a Greenlandic perspective by Juliane Henningsen, MP, UN Treaty Event, New York, June 4

It's an honor to be able to address such a distinguished audience, in this important building on such an important topic – climate change.

My name is Juliane Henningsen and I am a member of the Danish parliament representing Greenland. I was elected to the parliament in November 2007. I am also a member of the Greenlandic Home Rule Parliament representing the party Inuit Ataqatigiit. At last but not least, I am a member of the Arctic parliamentary cooperation.

My home town is Ilulissat. That city has become famous as the city to go to when you want to see for yourself the impact of global warming. US- presidential hopeful John McCain has been there. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi have dropped by to see the melting glaciers for themselves.

Ilulissat means in Greenlandic iceberg. And in Ilulissat icebergs are melting away. The glaciers are melting away. The sea ice is decreasing. The polar bear might soon be listed as an endangered species.

The arctic icecap has only half the size that is had 50 years ago. The nature is changing.

For us, people actually living in the Arctic, we have to deal with the consequences of climate changes and the effects on the arctic environment caused by global warming every day.

It has consequences for us!

We are living our whole life in the Arctic. And many of us have ancestors who have lived in the Arctic through many generations. We have through centuries adapted our way of living and our cultures to the arctic conditions.

The arctic cultures, like the Inuit culture, have adapted to the extreme and constantly changing arctic environment. I think it is some of our cultural mechanisms that have made it possible for the Inuit to survive in this ever changing arctic environment.

We have many old sayings on what people can do to change the weather. I don't think that many of us today believe in all of the old sayings.

But they do tell us, that there is an old Inuit understanding of the relationship between human actions and changes in the environment. And we have through generations adapted to the changing arctic climate, when we have lived on different places for summer camps and winter places.

What we are experiencing these years in Greenland does not suit all of us well.

For sure the Inuit hunters in the Northern parts of Greenland, Canada, Alaska and Russia are not happy with the fact that the sea ice is getting unreliable. These hunters can no longer go hunting during the winter months the way they have been doing for generations. The Arctic has become an environment of risk and an environment at risk.

The hunters will have to change their way of living, and such changes are not always easy to live with.

In the way we look at climate change we have a saying that “nothing is so bad that it is not good for something else”.

While the reduction of the ice cover may have a negative impact on some hunting activities, it may open up new opportunities for other activities like fisheries. Increasing sea temperatures seem to open up for new fishing possibilities for our fishermen.

A new generation of hunters and fishermen, building on their ancestors’ skills, and knowledge will and must learn how to cope with the changes.

In the southern part of Greenland we actually have longer growing seasons, and we can now almost grow all the potatoes and other vegetables we need in Greenland.

In the southern part of Greenland climate changes do not mean the same kind of challenges as they do for the hunters in the northern part of Greenland. In this part of my country we also have a strong tradition of sheep farming.

We see more tourists coming to Greenland, especially on cruise ships. And I might add, also a great deal of climate tourists. For the first time, the Northwest Passage – a sea route to Asia may be opened for shipping in the near a future.

And it is a positive effect that many tourists want to see my beautiful country.

Greenland has, for some time, been the focus of many international climate research activities. By the end of this summer, more than 3,400 scientists from 60 countries have been working in Greenland.

Denmark and Greenland have decided to create a climate centre at the Greenlandic University in Nuuk. I am quite pleased that we have agreed to create this centre in Greenland where climate change is literally going on outside the front door.

When I look at Greenland and the other Arctic regions I can see both challenges and advantages in relation to climate change.

The dominating political current in Greenland these years is aiming at more political independence from Denmark. Climate change has already opened new areas for the exploitation of mineral resources as the Icecap is retreating.

And in combination with the political and economic control of our mineral resources it will open new opportunities for Greenland to gain more economic and political independence from Denmark.

Therefore I am happy to tell you that in Greenland historic events have taken place in the last weeks.

The Danish – Greenlandic Self–Rule Commission was established in June 2004 to identify areas which could be taken over for self-rule.

The Commission has now ended its work and has handed its report to the Greenlandic Prime Minister Hans Enoksen and the Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

One of the big issues addressed in the Self-Rule Commissions work is the right to the Greenlandic underground.

The Commission has decided that the Home-Rule government will have the right to secure minerals from the Greenlandic underground, while at the same time future revenues will be deducted from the Danish block grant.

The Self-Rule Commission has also agreed that minerals in Greenland’s underground belong to Greenland. This means that one of our achievements in the coming agreement will be full Greenlandic control of our resources – both the renewable and un-renewable resources.

This does not mean that Greenland is becoming independent from Denmark now. The relations between Denmark and Greenland are good, solid and warm. But it means that the Greenlandic people are now becoming even more self governing. I am personally very much in favour of that. As the prime ministers said after the ceremony:

“It was a great day in the common history of our two countries”.

The new law of Self-Rule will now be sent to a referendum on November the 25th 2008. The referendum will not entail a withdrawal from the Danish state.

If the Greenlandic People votes in favour of the law, it is planned that the new Self-ruled Greenland will be a reality from the Greenlandic National Day next year on June 21st 2009.

In 2009, Denmark – together with Greenland and the Faroe Islands – will take over the chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

With Greenland being at the centre stage of climate change and very much in the focus of international climate research, we will continue to focus on climate change and related issues and to do our best to give it a human dimension and a human face.

In 2009 Denmark will also be hosting the United Nations Conference on Climate change in Copenhagen. This will give a very good opportunity to demonstrate the urgent need for action to slow down climate change, and to speed up new strategies in dealing with global warming.

Greenland will of course be active in preparing the big summit in Copenhagen, and the Greenland Home Rule Government will support and promote every positive step and action that will help us deal with climate change.

Qujanaq – thank you for your attention.