

Climate Change in Greenland

Arctic Side Event – Nordic Pavilion

Speech by Minister for Finance, Mineral Resources and Foreign Affairs Mr. Vittus Qujaukitsoq

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Ministers, Excellences, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to share with you some of the important challenges we face in the Arctic and how we are adapting to the big changes occurring.

Changes in the climate are tangible and undeniable in the Arctic. The multi-year sea ice, mountain glaciers, ice caps and the Greenland Ice Sheet have all been declining faster since 2000 than they did in previous decades. The average extent of sea ice cover in summer has declined by 15 – 20 % over the past 30 years.

We expect to see continued increases in temperature, continued melting of the Ice Sheet, changes in permafrost and varying ice cover, both on land and at sea. Temperatures in the permafrost have risen by up to 2 °C. These are all factors that affect our society and our living conditions and that require adaptation and increased resilience.

The consequence of this is that our traditional lifestyle, hunting and fishing are being fundamentally affected and the changes pose a serious challenge to our way of life and our unique Arctic biodiversity.

Hunting still plays an important role in Greenlandic society and remains a valuable contribution to the economy of most households. Climate change is having considerable impacts on the conditions and prospects for the hunting profession in Greenland due to increased unpredictability and a growing risk associated with travelling on the ice in certain periods of the year.

Changes in the quality and extent of snow and ice cover affect the livelihoods in many communities and challenges the cultural survival of our people. Climate change is affecting Greenlandic

biodiversity and the access to some of our important fishing and hunting areas and thereby challenges the traditional way of life.

The environmental balance in Greenland is not only challenged by climate change. In recent years, countries and NGOs from outside the Arctic have taken a new interest in Arctic affairs. This interest has also led to decisions like the EU's sealskin ban, which have severely harmed Arctic people and the environmental balance in the Arctic regions. International efforts to ban the trade in sealskin have removed the livelihoods of many hunters in Greenland, and has destroyed the ecological balance of a sustainable managed resource. Arctic peoples are under continuous pressure, not only from a natural environment that is often changing faster than man can adapt, but also from irrational and non-sustainable regulations imposed by countries outside the Arctic.

Adaptation to climate change is a priority and we have a tradition of adapting to a changing climate. Knowledge and information is the basis for necessary adaptation. Greenland is also a hub for extensive and on-going climate research and through a continued focus on climate monitoring and research activities, Greenland contributes to the strengthening of the national and international scientific climate research community.

As an example, the U.S. National Science Foundation is currently financing and co-financing more than 200 different scientific projects involving Greenland. Some of these projects have a particular focus on Greenland.

Within the Arctic Council, Greenland is working actively to put special emphasis on incorporating local and traditional knowledge into the scientific assessments that are produced by its various working groups. The current US chairmanship is promoting this agenda.

The Greenland Climate Research Centre carries out climate change research and specifically focuses on assessing the expected impacts of climate change on Greenlandic society and the human dimensions of climate change – including adaptation and prevention strategies.

For the past 4500 years Greenland has been the land of the Inuit, and my people understand and belong to this land. It is important to listen to the people with the most experience and knowhow to survive in the Arctic, which is the region which experiences the most significant and rapid climate change, in order to learn from our experiences and observations. Only in this manner, can we achieve an overall understanding of the severe impacts of current climate changes on our planet.

In the Arctic Council's 2013 Arctic Biodiversity Assessment the status of trends of biological diversity in the Arctic were synthesized and addressed. The Arctic Biodiversity Assessment was a key example of how the Arctic Council works to include indigenous knowledge.

The Government of Greenland would like to strengthen research and cooperation activities with the international science community. This is why Greenland is actively working to contribute to the understanding of the different effects of climate change in the Arctic. In understanding and coping with the human dimension of climate change the Arctic, and Greenland in particular, is key.

Because, while climate change in Greenland is changing the conditions of life for our people, we are having to manage a complete transformation of the economic basis for our country. With future climate changes in the Arctic there are serious challenges, but also opportunities for us as a country, but nowhere else on the planet are changes today felt so drastically as in the Arctic.

Qujanaq!

Thank you for your attention.
