

Speech by the Minister for Foreign Affairs
at the Stefánsson Arctic Institute in Akureyri,
9 September 2004

Mr President, Your Majesties, Your Royal Highness, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to be here at the Stefánsson Arctic Institute in Akureyri. I have been asked to talk about the Swedish Arctic policy and I am very happy to do so. I will focus on Arctic policy issues of interest to Sweden but this, of course, will include many issues of concern also to other countries.

Talking about Swedish Arctic policy at the Stefánsson Arctic Institute in Akureyri in Iceland is very appropriate. Here in Akureyri, close to the Arctic Circle, in this beautiful setting of mountains and sea, one is constantly reminded of the Arctic. Vilhjalmur Stefánsson was one of your countrys great scientists who travelled the Arctic and successfully communicated his vision of the friendly Arctic to a wider audience.

Sweden has also had its share of eminent personalities who strove to fulfil lifelong dreams of exploring the mysteries of the Arctic in the days when the Arctic was looked upon as a challenging and secret mass of unknown ice. Let me just mention two such examples, the balloon expedition of S.A. Andrée and A.E. Nordenskjölds Vega expedition. Despite the fact that both of those expeditions ended in tragedy on the Arctic ice, they left a legacy that inspired many generations of Swedish polar scientists and fascinated the imagination of the general public.

Today, however, we look upon the Arctic differently. The Arctic is still a focal area for scientific research but it is also an inhabited region. About four million people live in the circumpolar Arctic, most of them west of the Ural mountains in the European part of the Arctic.

Iceland, Sweden and the other Nordic countries together with the Russian Federation, Canada and the United States are referred to as the Arctic States. Our eight countries, and no others, have territory in the Arctic. Those of our citizens who live and work in the Arctic have the same right to a good life and to economic and social development as the other inhabitants of our countries.

The eight Arctic States, together with representatives of the indigenous peoples in the Arctic, have formed an intergovernmental body, the Arctic Council, as a high level forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of the Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common arctic issues, in particular issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic. The Arctic Council was formally established in 1996 in Ottawa, Canada. Sweden is proud to be a member of this regional body.

The Arctic States are direct stakeholders in the Arctic and our governments have specific territorial rights and obligations in the region and therefore a particular responsibility for what happens here. However, we are not the only countries interested in developments in the Arctic.

Sweden welcomes other countries that have expressed an interest in the work of the Arctic Council (such as Spain and China) and in becoming observer states in the Council and contributing to its work.

The Arctic Council has made great progress over the past eight years. I would like to take this opportunity to compliment Iceland and my colleague, Minister for Foreign Affairs Halldór Ásgrímsson, the present Chair of the Arctic Council. Iceland is doing an excellent job as Chair of the Arctic Council and we are very pleased to be working with you in this forum.

One of the main issues on the agenda of the Arctic Council is climate change. The impact of climate change in the Arctic is being studied and analysed by scientists all around the world. The Arctic region is an early indicator of the magnitude of climate change to be expected in the rest of the globe. Solid knowledge of climate change in the Arctic gives us an early warning of what is likely to happen in the rest of the world.

Climate change in the Arctic has strong repercussions on the worlds climate system as a whole. The ice is melting in the Arctic. Melting ice from glaciers on land is turning into rising water levels worldwide, centimetre after centimetre, year by year. Melting sea ice is turning into open waters. The classical white horizons of the North Pole may slowly but steadily change into the dark blue expanses of the Arctic Ocean. The effects of such developments will be profound.

The Arctic Council will be releasing a comprehensive report the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) this autumn. This report documents established scientific knowledge about changes that are already taking place in the Arctic. It also contains projections about what we can expect in the future if drastic measures are not taken to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

The Swedish Government is very concerned about climate change. We are working hard to convince other governments of the need to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Implementation of this agreement is a first step towards major concerted action to preserve the present delicate balance of the global climate system and avoid disruptions to the ecosystems of the world. Together with our EU colleagues, we are also eager to start the process of designing further action against greenhouse gas emissions beyond 2012 (the end of the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol). We believe that global participation in this process is crucial and urge all our partners in the Arctic Council to join in the multilateral efforts necessary to make further progress.

Climate change is a global problem for which all governments have a shared responsibility, manifested in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that was adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Icelandic Chair of the Arctic Council has the full support of Sweden in its efforts to prepare the ground for the political discussion on the findings of the ACIA report to be held at the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Reykjavik on 24 November this year.

Climate change in the Arctic is important, not only because of its effects on the Arctic Ocean and the global climate system. It also has direct effects on key economic activities that depend on the Arctic marine environment such as fisheries, transportation, mining and oil and gas exploration. These industries are very important to the national economies of several of the Arctic States. They are the cornerstones of the local economies of many northern communities. The traditional lifestyles of many indigenous peoples also depend on the Arctic marine environment.

On land in the populated parts of the Arctic, as in Sweden, with no Arctic marine territory of our own, we are equally exposed to the effects of climate change.

Our indigenous people, the Sami, are particularly vulnerable in this context. They will need to adapt their grazing practices to changes in ecosystems to ensure the continued survival of reindeer herding as a source of their livelihood and cultural identity.

Our mining and forestry industries too will need to review land use management in the north. Infrastructure such as dams, hydroelectricity plants, railways, roads and bridges will need to be surveyed for damage caused by a warming climate.

Over the past few years, we have noted an increase in the release of methane from the wetlands in northern Sweden. This is an indicator of changes in the flora and fauna at the landscape level. Some unique Arctic species may soon be close to extinction if warming continues. Present practices for conservation of biodiversity in the north need to be reviewed.

As I said initially, global climate change and the impact on the global climate system of changes in the Arctic is an important domestic and foreign policy issue for Sweden. We are working actively at home, in the EU and at the global level to build consensus around the action that is required. The Swedish Government is fully committed to pursuing this work, with particular focus on the measures required to mitigate the adverse effects of emission reduction and facilitate adaptation. This also applies to the forum of the Arctic Council in which the Nordic countries and Canada meet together with Russia and the United States.

Research and science have always played a major role in Arctic policy making and this will continue. Polar research is largely an international endeavour and Swedish polar research too is based on cooperation with researchers and research organisations in other countries, aiming at promoting competence, creative ideas and the cost-effective use of demanding logistics and advanced equipment.

Swedish polar research comprises the natural sciences related to land, ice, atmosphere and oceans as well as disciplines such as astrophysics, medicine, cultural history and technology. Sweden has strong research communities in many of these areas, particularly in the natural sciences, but also in the social sciences, which I believe are gaining ground.

Sweden has started to prepare for the International Polar Year (IPY) in 2007-2008 and this preparatory process will further stimulate Swedish polar research. The IPY 2007-2008 is an international endeavour under the auspices of the United Nations and the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) which will highlight the polar regions as a whole, both the Arctic and Antarctica.

With regard to the Arctic, Sweden has several unique research platforms of world class where we welcome foreign scientists and host major international research programmes. Let me just mention the Swedish Academy of Sciences scientific research station at Abisko with its network of terrestrial substations, the Space

Corporations launch facility Esrange for space research and atmospheric balloons and the custom-built icebreaker research vessel, the Oden.

Right now, the Oden is on a very sophisticated drilling expedition at 87.5 degrees North, on the Lomonossov Ridge close to the North Pole, together with the Russian icebreaker Sovyetskie Soyuz and one more vessel. Drilling has gone well. The expedition has collected soil samples from deep down in the Arctic Sea floor that cover climate history going back 50 million years in time.

It gives me great pleasure to forward a greeting from the Oden to you Mr President, to the Swedish Royal Family and to everyone else here today, that I received this morning by email.

I will read it to you, it is from Anders Karlqvist, head of the Swedish Polar Research Secretariat and it reads as follows:

"Members of the international Arctic Coring Expedition on board the Swedish icebreaker Oden, send their warm greetings and best wishes to King Carl Gustaf, Queen Silvia and the President of Iceland. This morning, Oden and two other vessel expeditions, the Swedish Vidar Viking and the Russian Sovietskiy Soyuz, are visiting the north pool on our way home to Scandinavia after concluding a successful marine biology expedition in the high arctic ocean. For the first time, scientists have recovered sediment core from as far as 430 meters beneath the seabed, in waters depth of nearly 1.300 meters. These core reveal the history of the arctic, spanning back to 55 millions years ago, a time when the arctic was icefree and subtropical. We wish you all success with your seminar at the arctic institute at the Akureyri."

undersigned by Anders Karlqvist

It is amazing what we can achieve with advanced telecommunications technology!

One of the essential requirements for successful Arctic research is access to reliable data. Modelling and projections are important research activities but in order to be credible, such work needs to be based on data from the real world and validated against historical time series from long-term measurements of actual conditions. Sweden therefore places great importance on the ongoing work aimed at developing and putting in place a permanent, comprehensive network of monitoring stations throughout the circumpolar Arctic (terrestrial, atmospheric and marine). We hope that the establishment of such a network under the auspices of the Arctic Council will be one of the lasting results of the IPY 2007-2008.

The Arctic is precious and unique, but we cannot look upon it merely as a nature reserve that should be the exclusive preserve of scientists and polar bears. We must remember that the people who live and work in the Arctic have a right to share in the welfare of our societies.

The indigenous peoples of the Arctic must be allowed to find ways of maintaining and developing their traditional sources of livelihood. Local communities must be encouraged to prosper. New economic activities must be allowed to gain ground. Tourism is already growing in the Arctic. These days, one is more likely to meet a tourist travelling round the Arctic than a scientist.. Oil and gas exploration is under way. Marine transport in the Arctic is expanding.

These and similar developments should not be seen as negative or incompatible. On the contrary, harmony between the different interests can be achieved. However, this is conditional on the governments of our countries working together and guiding their economic development so as to fully take into account the sensitivity of Arctic ecosystems and to ensure sustainable development throughout the whole of the circumpolar Arctic.

We need to jointly monitor developments in the Arctic very closely in the years to come. Fortunately, modern advanced information and communications technology is providing us with new tools that will be very helpful in spanning the enormous distances of the Arctic region.

The Nordic countries are working on a common strategy for sustainable development for the period 2005-2008. These efforts also cover activities in the Arctic. Sweden and the other Nordic countries are guided by a commitment to develop cooperation and the division of labour between existing regional bodies and institutions. Our aim is to support the well-being of the indigenous peoples, including gender equality and the sustainable use of natural resources and to continue circumpolar cooperation on education and scientific research. The Nordic countries will also contribute to the Arctic Councils work on identification of indicators and monitoring for sustainable development and support work in the Arctic Council Working Group on Sustainable Development.

In the Barents region, which is a part of the Arctic region, the Nordic countries will support implementation of the measures recommended in the so-called NEFCO/AMAP Hot Spot List and in the action plan for the Barents Region Cleaner Production Strategy to reduce pollution from sources in northwestern Russia and strive for the implementation of concrete measures to improve nuclear safety. The Kola Peninsula still has the worlds largest concentration of nuclear installations. They represent a threat to the vulnerable environment of the Arctic and to

neighbouring sub-Arctic areas. There is also a risk that nuclear material from these sites could fall into the hands of terrorists.

Sweden is committed to continuing its close cooperation with Russia and other countries, to solve these problems. This is an important part of the Swedish Arctic policy.

Let me close by highlighting an area of regional cooperation that the Swedish Government would like to see expanded and further developed in the next couple of years, namely emergency and rescue services cooperation.

Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia have already started to construct a framework for operational crossborder cooperation between our emergency and rescue services agencies in the Barents region. I believe that the time has come to make a serious effort to expand that cooperation into a circumpolar framework for operational cooperation between the relevant emergency and rescue services in all the Arctic States. I hope that the Arctic Council will feel called upon to take on this task.

Thank you for your attention.