

2019-09-18 Remarks by Ambassador Björn Lyrvall at the UArctic reception at Stockholm City Hall

- Thanks Outi and apologies for interrupting the intense conversation. I promise to be brief. But really want, on behalf of the Swedish Government, to take this opportunity to welcome all of you to Stockholm and its famous City Hall. Many thanks in particular to the City of Stockholm for hosting us here tonight.

- Let me also say that I think it's appropriate that the Council of UArctic convenes tonight at this historic venue, as you've just adopted the historic new Constitution, creating the UArctic Association, a legal body under Finnish Law. This marks yet another important step in the successful life of UArctic. Born out of the context of the Arctic Council through the Iqaluit Declaration in 1998, you have grown steadily under its support, and now - at 21, you are coming of age. And have many good years ahead of you.

- As Swedish Senior Arctic Official, I also want to thank the just concluded Finnish chairmanship for firmly promoting Education as an Arctic Council priority, thus strengthening the Council's close cooperation with UArctic.

- But despite progress, it could be argued that you're meeting at a time of increased polarization and when facts are being questioned. So I'd like to make four quick points as a pitch for Arctic research and science cooperation. Coming from someone who's not a scientist or a real expert on the Arctic. But who's over the past couple of years have grown more and more convinced about the importance of what you do in the impressive circumpolar network of UArctic.

- First point. Perhaps self-evident: **The Arctic is important**. It's about climate change and environmental challenges. But also Security, Economic development. The well being of the people of the Arctic. Extraction of resources. Transports. This all paves way for a big power game - a new "great game". As you know, China in its first Arctic strategy published a year ago talks about the importance of the Arctic for the survival, the development and the shared future for mankind. And goes on arguing for research collaboration. The EU, on its part, has also published its Arctic communication, also with an emphasis on research, and appointed an Arctic Ambassador.

On the political level in Sweden, there is a broad understanding of the importance of Arctic affairs, although not always matched by the appropriate resources. The Swedish Arctic strategy from 2011, updated in 2016, focuses on the swift changes

in the region, and asks for deeper international and regional cooperation. And stresses the importance of research outlining that “Sweden will continue to be a leading research nation in the climate and environmental field and will focus on the human impact of climate change”. We’ll start work on a new Arctic strategy this fall, and I’m sure the focus on research cooperation will be even stronger.

- Second point. **There’s a lack of data about Arctic developments.** As a layman, one would think that every square meter on this planet has been studied. But the High Arctic is a “white spot” on the map in this respect. Need considerably more data points, not least from the Arctic wintertime. And that’s difficult and expensive. This calls for international mobilization of resources and cooperation. Science Diplomacy.

- Third point. **This is urgent.** We don’t have to remind ourselves that the Arctic is undergoing enormous and rapid changes. An escalating development. Warming twice the rate as the world at large. Even with a strict implementation of the Paris agreement, we will not see a stabilization in our lifetimes. Whatever we do, Arctic challenges will rise. A rather dramatic picture is painted in Arctic Council expert reports, also calling on Member States to prioritize research and knowledge building to enhance certainty in predictions of changes to facilitate the development of effective adaptation responses. We have no time to waste. And once again there’s a need to work together. As you do through UArctic.

- Fourth point. **The benefits of this cooperation go beyond research results.** As a diplomat I can say, that Arctic cooperation contributes to de-escalation and international cooperation also in other areas. I would argue that Science Diplomacy works. The Arctic Council with its eight member states, six PPs and almost 40 observers, must, despite the recent setback at the Rovaniemi ministerial, be considered a success story. Promoting world class knowledge production, having managed to reach an agreement on Science cooperation. The Second Arctic Science Ministerial was held in Berlin last fall, bringing together ministers from 26 countries. Powerful Swedish research ice-breaker Oden went to the North Pole on an expedition for the ninth time last August. This was yet another example of a fruitful collaboration between our Polar Research Secretariat and the US National Science Foundation, opening up for broad international participation.

Add to that our research stations in Abisko and Tarfala as important Swedish contributions, and dynamic university cooperations such as Arctic Five in the

north. And Sweden intends to continue to contribute to education and research in and about the Arctic.

Dear friends,

- The UArctic in its Strategic Plan 2020 sets out important goals for the North – under the headlines Educational Access for Northern Students, Research Representation in the North, Expanding Knowledge of the North and an Engaged Membership Network. A pretty impressive set of tasks. And the good story is that a lot has already been done to achieve them.

- Good luck with your important work!

- And enjoy the evening and the rest of your stay in Sweden.

- Thank You!