

Talk by Ms Sara Olsvig, MP Denmark/Greenland, Member of SCPAR

Mr. / Mrs. Chair, Arctic parliamentarians, Ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for this opportunity to talk to you this morning. It is a great honour for me to take part in the work of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region as I am still very new in politics. I was elected last year and hold one of the two Greenlandic seats in the Danish parliament.

It is also a great honour for me to talk specifically on this subject; Human Development in the Arctic: The interplay of Research, Authorities and Residents, as I am an Arctic resident myself and also an anthropologist by training.

In my professional life, my first meeting with the international community was at one of the last negotiations of the Working Group on the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the UN in Geneva. It was in December 2005, and it literally blew my mind away.

At that point, the work had been going on for more than two decades, and there was a clear expectation that the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples would soon be adopted, but still, at some points, it also seemed far away.

I was introduced to the disagreements on whether to talk about the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent or Free Prior and Informed Consultation. I was introduced to the revolutionary fact, that indigenous peoples would actually be recognized as peoples by the international society, and I was introduced to the extremely complicated negotiations on the rights to lands, territories and resources.

The Declaration was adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2007. At that time, I worked for the Inuit Circumpolar Council, which is one of the Permanent Participants in the Arctic Council, and I knew, that for us in the Arctic the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples was a milestone, especially for Saami and Inuit leaders, as well as others, that had participated in the negotiations for the last two decades.

I also knew that indigenous peoples of the Arctic in some ways already had been recognized by our states, as the Indigenous Peoples' Organizations from the very beginning have been an integrated part of the Arctic Council - our region's mayor collaborative and policy making body. A position that many, many other indigenous peoples around the world did not hold in their regional policy making bodies, and till this day are still struggling to achieve.

When the declaration was adopted in 2007, many of our Arctic states endorsed it. A few still has not, and in my opinion we still have work to do on that issue.

I am extremely happy that the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region continue to emphasize the importance of recognizing our indigenous peoples as part of our policy and decision making body. We show a good example to the rest of the world.

It is extremely important, that the Arctic Council continues to strengthen and maintain this unique structure – a structure that show that our focus *is* on the peoples and the communities of our region.

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The human dimension of the development of the Arctic has always been a core principle to the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians.

(The committee has pushed for an increased focus on human health on the Arctic agenda, encouraged a closer cooperation between the ministers of health of the Arctic governments and has supports the work with a second Arctic Human Development Report.)

The committee continues to push an agenda with the human dimension in focus, and at this particular conference, I am also very happy that we have been able to agree on recommendations to

the continued strengthening of the human dimension of Arctic activities, research, governance and living.

In 2004 the Arctic Human Development Report was published. The report outlined many of the most important aspects and research areas of human development in the Arctic, and the often vulnerable economic systems, issues of health and education, and issues of resource governance and international relations.

Much has happened and changed since 2004, but still the first Arctic Human Development Report is an instrumental document which has served as a good foundation for the further research, and policy making on the field.

Many of the recommendations of the first Arctic Human Development Report have been acted upon by policy makers, local communities and the research community of the Arctic and we very much welcome a second Arctic Human Development Report, which will also serve as a tool for an overarching evaluation of human development in the Arctic.

It has been said many times, and it will be said many times in the years to come: the Arctic is changing. The climate is changing, the societies are changing, and the dynamics of the Arctic as an increasingly important region of the World are changing.

And naturally, the Arctic peoples are adapting to these changes. Our peoples have historically been resilient and adaptable, but can we adapt fast enough with the rapid changes we are experiencing right now? The core question I want to raise is; how do we *make sure*, that the peoples and societies of the Arctic are not undermined and diminished as the Arctic changes are increasingly rapid. How do we ensure a sustainable development in the Arctic, a development that does not only focus on the economic opportunities, oil and gas, shipping and mining , mega industries and all that comes with these things, but *also* focuses on development of our societies and cultures based on premises of our societies?

And as an anthropologist I know for a fact that cultures and societies are never static and that change is natural, but too rapid change in societies with small numbers of inhabitants and a surrounding world seeing it as its most important mission to be part of that change, can also end up tipping things in an unhealthy way.

As parliamentarians of the Arctic I see it as our most important job, to seek solutions that ensure a safe and sustainable development of the Arctic – not only for protection of the environment, but also, and equally as important, for the protection of our peoples and societies. Protecting one or the other is not, and should not be, a contrast.

The recommendations we have agreed upon focus on capacity building in the Arctic, on anchoring knowledge in the Arctic, on the inclusion of traditional and local knowledge in management and research, on the continued focus on human health, in particular mental health and prevention, on food safety and on human rights and gender equality (which was actually not in my report simply because I forgot, so thank you very much to those who remembered).

We also recommend that our students and researchers more easily can travel and exchange knowledge across our borders, and that local communities are part of management programs such as community based monitoring of living resources.

Many documents, reports and declarations about these issues have already been written by Arctic peoples themselves and researchers and scholars from here and from around the world. Some of them I have referred to in my report. But more and new knowledge is needed, so we also recommend that knowledge gaps - because a lot of research is done they still do exist - are analyzed, and that cross border knowledge sharing is increased and that the cooperation between the University of the Arctic and Indigenous Peoples' Organizations is continuously strengthened.

We have also included a recommendation to support the plans for an International Polar Decade. My hope is, that in both this and in the International Polar Years to come, the inclusion of social

sciences, and the focus on how to build systems that actually improve the very necessary cultural and social impact assessments that must be conducted prior to industrial development project in the Arctic, are improved. We have a common challenge and a common responsibility to do that job.

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As part of the rapid changes in the Arctic, many of us experience an increase in industrial activities. The mayor industrial projects that are taking place or are being prospected must not become the new colonizers of the North. Decades have passed since the de-colonization of many of our countries and regions started, and we must learn from the experiences colonization brought with it, and not make the same mistakes again.

I strongly agree with those of you that continue to remind us, that we must continue to debate whether it really is necessary to do actually do oil and gas exploitation, mega industries and mining in the Arctic. My position is, that we must continue to seek and develop alternative opportunities for economic development, but not limit the possibilities and rights of the Arctic peoples to develop their economies on the terms that there are today.

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In some of our Arctic societies we still have some of the highest suicide rates of the world. We have social and cultural problems that resemble many other post-colonies, and we are working hard to reconcile with our destinies, look forward and build healthy and strong societies.

In Greenland, where I come from, we also still see these challenges. And we meet them by securing education, health care and social development at the same time as we are trying to build a sustainable economy. It is not easy, and many decisions are to be taken, but we meet the challenges and we take the responsibility.

We get the strength from looking around – seeing that opportunities are there, and that we have good partners and good neighbours to rely on and learn from.

The strong partnerships that has been build among our Arctic nations is invaluable, and we should do everything we can to protect this partnership. We consist of very different peoples, very different sizes of states and nations, and very different societies and cultures.

In my opinion, our strength lies in the solidarity that we show each other, when we get together around the tables, and time after time negotiate important statements, even legally binding documents, with inclusion of both states and peoples of our regions in our decision making. That is putting the human dimension in focus.

But I also think that one of the central issues we still owe ourselves to debate is the issue of how to define sustainability. As it was noted yesterday, the term sustainability is used all the time, and sometimes even mis-appropriately. Definitely, when we hear mining and oil companies claiming that they do sustainable resource extraction, we know that that is not true. The extraction itself is really not likely to be sustainable. We also know that when talking about environmental sustainability we cannot just assume that measures taken to ensure the protection of the environment is necessarily the same as being culturally and socially sustainable. I can't refrain from mentioning, that there are actually indigenous peoples of this world that has been re-located from their lands in the name of forestry and hydro-power damming. How do we ensure, that the protection of the environment and the protection of societies go hand in hand?

One thing is sure – we are not likely to go back into the qajaqs and start hunting seals with harpoons again. We still hunt seals because we actually also still like to eat seal meat, but we have of course *developed* our way of hunting, and seal products have become products of commerce, if just somebody would like to buy them.

Economic development is needed, and this will very likely involve different kinds of industrial developments, even in the sparsely populated areas. So, we need the protection of the environment

and the protection of the societies to go hand in hand, and to make sure that the decisions taken on what, when and how are taken on the basis of knowledge and facts.

Much too we often meet, though, is this notion, that the Arctic is this wilderness, where the people live in certain traditional ways, and that indigenous peoples are not interested in developing new economies. All these notions generally give a wrong and outdated image of the Arctic.

What the surrounding world also tend to forget is, that there are actually people living in the Arctic. People and peoples, that are part of a globalized world.

So, dear friends, much of the work to be done still lie ahead of us. The standing committee must maintain its role as a spokesman for the *people* of the Arctic and to advocate for a strong human dimension of the development.

It is of *utmost* importance, that the rights of the peoples of the Arctic are respected and protected, and that the Arctic peoples themselves are the decision makers regarding the development of our societies, including the development of resources, industries, shipping routes and other activities in the Arctic.

The Arctic peoples must themselves set the agenda for the decades to come, and take the lead in both local, regional and international policy making and research agendas in the Arctic.

We have much to protect and much to achieve.

Mr. and Madam Chairpersons, I want to conclude with a short quotation which I was reminded of last week in Copenhagen. It is by the philosopher Albert Camus, he was French, I think, but from a former colony. He said something like: "Do not walk behind me, maybe I will not lead. Do not walk in front of me, maybe I will not follow. Walk by my side, and be my friend".

Qujanaq.