

## **Address by the Prime Minister of the Faroe Islands**

**Mr Aksel V. Johannesen**

Former President and chairman Grímsson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a true pleasure and indeed an honor to join you here today for the Arctic Circle Assembly. It is a great privilege for me - on behalf of the government and the people of the Faroe Islands - to speak to such a distinguished gathering of people from such a broad range of backgrounds and interests.

The Faroese Government is committed to making the Faroes a more active player in the Arctic and the global community as a whole.

Like other nations and communities in the Arctic, the Faroese economy, society and very way of life is closely connected to, and highly dependent on the natural environment. Of course, for us as an island nation, the sea is all-important. It is our resource base, and it is our physical, environmental and cultural connection with the rest of the region and the indeed the whole world.

The Faroes are overwhelmingly dependent on fisheries. The fishing industry is the mainstay of the Faroese economy. Safeguarding the marine environment and using its resources sustainably is a major responsibility the Faroe Islands share with the rest of the international community.

The Faroes play an active role in regional fisheries cooperation. As part of this it is a priority of my Government to take on an active role in international cooperation on the future management of fisheries in the international waters of the central Arctic ocean. We therefore hope that the ongoing negotiations on an 'Agreement to prevent unregulated high seas fisheries in the central arctic ocean' will reach a successful conclusion at the meeting in the Faroe Islands next month, so that we can refer in the future to the 'Tórshavn Agreement'.

I believe the Arctic nations can and should lead the way in showing how issues related to the management of natural resources can best be resolved in peaceful and mutually respectful ways.

*Former President and chairman, Ladies and gentlemen*

In the Faroe Islands we see great strategic potential in our own location in the region - both in relation to the Northwest sea route as well as the western arm of the Northern Sea Route, which is expected to have the greatest significance in the future. We have developed a strong framework for present and future activities with high environmental and safety standards at the forefront – and we take an active part in international contingency planning and search and rescue cooperation.

As a coastal nation, the Faroe Islands have a major responsibility to safeguard the seas and oceans around us and to develop their huge potential as a source of food, energy and transport in a sustainable way.

Our job as governments is to create a clear and effective framework of regulation, both national and international, that ensures the right balance between the biological limits of nature, our rights and duties to use our natural resources sustainably, and the need to create wealth and economic development. Getting this balance right will make us all much better prepared to cope with sudden and even dramatic changes.

We are already witnessing the effect of these dramatic climate changes. Even though turning back the clock is impossible, it is encouraging for our region that consensus was finally reached on how to address this alarming situation with the signing of the Paris Agreement. Because of our dependency on our natural resources and our geographical location, it is natural for us to be part of this agreement and we will be finalizing our internal ratification process early next year.

In order to fulfil our obligations, we plan to accelerate the shift to renewable energy, so we can become self-sufficient in green energy.

We will prioritize the systematic expansion, production and shift towards renewables. At least half of all homes and buildings shall, within ten years, be heated using renewables. By 2030 all onshore electricity shall be generated from renewable sources. In order to harness surplus electricity, and allow for greater expansion, we must promote green energy consumption by households, transport and industry alike. It will be necessary to restructure the existing schemes of subsidies and levies in order to reach our targets.

Green energy heating shall be installed in all new public buildings and plans to cut and shift energy consumption shall be drawn up for older buildings. We will promote industry development and education in green energy and technology.

*Former President and chairman, Ladies and gentlemen*

As an island nation in the West Nordic region of the Arctic, the Faroe Islands have many political, economic and social challenges and opportunities in common with our neighbouring countries.

Faroese contributions to Arctic cooperation are a natural part of the continued development of the Faroe Islands as a relevant and constructive partner in international cooperation in the region.

Historically, Faroese participation and expertise in Arctic cooperation has been especially strong in research and monitoring, covering a range of areas from flora and sea birds, marine biology, oceanography and climate change, to environmental pollution and radiation monitoring, as well as human health, social development and governance.

The commonalities we share with other circumpolar communities provide an excellent basis for focused and effective international research cooperation in our region. And such cooperation is not only necessary, but absolutely vital for small countries - like ours.

The Faroe Islands are proud to be a partner in the EDU-ARCTIC project. This project uses interactive, innovative online tools that allow everyone to use Arctic research as a teaching tool in secondary school education in Europe. The possibilities for distance learning and online education are becoming more and more relevant to the Faroe Islands as well as to the rest of the Arctic region.

Faroese institutions of higher education offer several educational programmes relevant for Arctic cooperation, in fields such as natural sciences, the social sciences and maritime affairs. The University of the Faroe Islands also takes part in a number of international cooperation agreements with Arctic partners, including the University of the Arctic network. One excellent example is the new international master program called West Nordic Studies, Governance and Sustainable Management, which was launched in cooperation between the University of the Faroe Islands and partner universities in Reykjavík, Akureyri, Nuuk, and Bodø.

To borrow the words of my colleague, Rigmor Dam, our Minister of Education, Research and Culture, at the recent White House meeting of Arctic Research Ministers in Washington DC:

We do not want the participation of the Faroe Islands in Arctic cooperation to focus on how small or remote we are. We want to use our unique voice to show the world how good we are at making size and distance irrelevant, not just for ourselves, but for everyone else.

When it comes to this kind of thinking - which is essential and must be promoted across the Arctic  
– I also believe our young people are already way ahead of the rest of us.

Thank you!