**Ministers, Members of Parliament, friends, ladies and gentlemen.**

I would like to thank the West Nordic Council for organising this side event and for the invitation to speak. I think the engagement we see by so many stakeholders here at Arctic Circle is a clear indication that our West Nordic region has become an area of new global interest. All the more reason for us to discuss our geopolitical position, status and challenges as countries in the region.

For decades, the West Nordic region has drawn international attention for scientific reasons, and this is still the case. But today we are now also seeing a growing focus on our region in the international political arena.

This shift presents us with an historic opportunity to influence the development of our region. At the same time, it is our call to take responsibility, both regionally and globally.

Lessons from history dictate that great powers try to influence the international – or regional – climate to their own advantage. As smaller powers, our primary interest is an international system based on the rule of law, multilateralism and strong institutions. It is paramount that external relations are governed by international agreements entered into by countries on a voluntary bases.

Climate change forces us to consider the geopolitical aspects of our regional dynamics and our region’s international context, but the international political climate is also at a crossroad.

Reestablishing of military bases in the north; increasing presence of naval capacities in the North Atlantic and regular military exercises along the borders of Europe are clear signs that geopolitics has been reintroduced. Emerging trading routes in the North; increasing interest in the Arctic in general and the possibility of conflict in the region require all countries – from small countries to great powers – to make sure that these challenges are dealt with in an orderly fashion based on dialogue with one another and respect for the peoples living in these regions.

For us in the West Nordic region, it is imperative that we cooperate closely and keep an ongoing dialogue about the challenges we face.

We must ask ourselves:

* Given the tensions in the area, is it thinkable that our region once again may become a crossroads of conflicting interests between the superpowers of our time?
* Are military installations likely to be expanded or even reestablished in the West Nordic countries?
* What preparations and considerations do we – as a region and individual countries – need to make in order to meet the challenges and to take advantage of the opportunities ahead?
* How do we, as non-state entities ensure that our voices are heard and our wishes are met on the international political arena?

In my opinion, the question of size is irrelevant in this context. As elected leaders in our respective countries, we have a duty to be aware of the geopolitical reality around us. We must believe that we matter – and also that the international framework within which we are based matters for us. Our role must be proactive and we must take responsibility. The best way to do that is through formal channels of cooperation such as agreements, fora and institutions – both on the political level as well as within civil society, industry and so on. In my view, that is how we can add weight to our region.

There are already rules, agreements and regulations in place governing our cooperation when it comes to, for example, Search and Rescue and Emergency Preparedness. But these can be strengthened in order to cater for the growing marine traffic in our region.

With respect to the Faroe Islands I could add that during the Cold War era, the Faroese government was not sufficiently informed on matters relating to defense and security policy. In light of the recently changed and more serious geopolitical situation in the North Atlantic, the Faroese government is currently discussing with the Danish government on how to ensure more and better information on policy issues relating to security.

**Dear friends and neighbours,**

There are no simple answers to the complexities that surround us. I am therefore very pleased for this opportunity to discuss geopolitical relations in the West Nordic region in a broad way.

Our task as countries and peoples in the West Nordic region is to strengthen our role and interact proactively with the international community in order to highlight our region’s resilience – and thus ensuring safety, security and sustainable development.