



**Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting
Nuuk, Greenland**

May 12, 2011

**Statement by
Inuit Circumpolar Council
Aqqaluk Lyngø, Chair**

Your Excellencies, Premier Kleist, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of all Inuit from Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Chukotka, I want to thank you, Madam Chair, for giving me the floor. We thank the Danish Chairmanship and Ambassador Møller for his capable guidance during the past two years. I also want to thank the Working Groups for their valuable input, including our Permanent Participant colleagues for their dedication to the work of the Arctic Council. We believe trust between the Arctic States and Permanent Participants has grown and that our views and interests are considered seriously. The Inuit Circumpolar Council looks forward to collaborating with the Swedish Chairmanship. We have a long positive relationship with Sweden and generations of experience cooperating with the Sámi living throughout Scandinavia.

One of the main objectives of the ICC is environmental cooperation, which has resulted in the first Inuit Conservation Strategy, and inspired others to take a closer look at the circumpolar Arctic environment. ICC was engaged in the Finnish initiative that eventually became the Arctic Council. As we move into a new and challenging two year term, it is important to reflect on how well we are doing. It is time to reflect on the health of the Arctic environment, and to focus on what the indicators for a healthy Arctic and its people are.

Some say the best indicator of a healthy Arctic can be found by measuring the effects of climate change. Others say the best indicator can be found by measuring the health of Arctic biodiversity. Still others say the best indicator is related to resource and economic development. Inuit believe, however, the key indicator that encompasses these and other measurements of a healthy Arctic environment is the state of well-being of Inuit and other Arctic peoples. Well-being is not limited to physical health; it includes mental health, vibrant cultures, and healthy communities with clean food, air, and water. I hope over the next two years, in all we do, we never forget the well-being of the Arctic peoples. The human dimension is the most important indicator of a healthy Arctic.

Due to the increase of existing and new industrial development in the Arctic, ICC launched an *Inuit Declaration on Resource Development Principles* yesterday. It outlines our collective concern over the increasing focus on oil and gas, minerals, and other resources found in Inuit Nunaat, our collective homeland. It sets out principles on what our conditions are for working together with those that want to exploit these resources. Industry, Arctic states and others cannot simply sail into the Arctic and take what they want for their benefit. We hope the Arctic Council will consider the views expressed in our Declaration.

We experience that environmental and animal rights organizations have a tendency, when they speak about the Arctic, to forget about the human beings living here. It is a daily struggle for the Indigenous Peoples' Organizations present, to explain our ethical and moral values to those organizations, and it is a daily struggle for us to explain to the surrounding world, that our lives are closely linked to the nature, and that the health of the environment is the pre-requisite of the health of human beings.

Inuit will continue to closely follow resource development and we believe the Arctic Council will stress the need for applying the highest possible standards, so our unique and extremely fragile ecosystem is protected. We depend on a healthy ecosystem to sustain our culture and well-being. We will continue to follow the progress of the creation of a *Mandatory Polar Code* being crafted by the International Maritime Organization. As you know, Inuit are maritime people, we also travel on the ice in the winter, and we depend on the living resources of the sea, and expect the most stringent regulations to be developed and applied.

Madam Chair. We thank Denmark/Greenland for taking up the challenge of human health and look forward to cooperating with Sweden to continue and expand upon that work. We are pleased that the Swedish Chairmanship has indicated that, among other priorities, health, and the situation of indigenous peoples will be a priority during their tenure.

While food safety and security has been a focus of the Arctic Council in the past, we believe this issue requires full attention at the Senior Arctic Officials and at Ministerial level. Food security is a global issue and Inuit depend on our foods for nutritional and cultural sustainability. Therefore, ICC commends the past work of ACAP, its efforts to clean up our fragile Arctic ecosystem, supports its future initiatives and would like to recommend a full circumpolar environmental pollution assessment be conducted to identify and contain the sources of pollution, and initiate steps for eventual site remediation.

We all know the Arctic Council is unique in its structure because it incorporates Arctic Indigenous Peoples in all of its deliberations. In the future we hope the Arctic states and Permanent Participants can become equals in the working and decision-making process and further strengthen the Council.

Before I conclude my remarks, I cannot refrain from reflecting upon this gathering. It is indeed historic, it's like we are witnessing "the living history", to quote a famous writer among us, namely Hillary Rodham Clinton. It is an honour for us that you are all here. For us Indigenous Peoples it is a big step, but also the right step, that we now can address our concerns and our future aspirations to you directly.

Madam Chair, Ministers, fellow Indigenous Peoples: the Inuit Circumpolar Council pledges to continue to be a strong partner as we move forward into a new era of Arctic cooperation. We must keep the Arctic safe and healthy, proceed cautiously with development, and never forget, that the Arctic Council can only be as strong as its attention to the human dimension.

Qujanaq. Thank you.