LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I WOULD LIKE TO START THIS INAUGURAL SESSION OF THE “ARCTIC CIRCLE”, OUTSIDE GREENLAND AND THE ARCTIC.

IT HAS TO BE RECOGNISED THAT ONE OF THE MAJOR PRESSURE FACTORS, AND AT THE SAME TIME DRIVERS OF PRESENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ARCTIC THESE YEARS, IS GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE.

MAN-MADE GLOBAL WARMING NOW POSES A DIRECT THREAT TO ALL OF US. WE ARE CURRENTLY HEADING TOWARDS A GLOBAL TEMPERATURE RISE EXCEEDING 2 DEGREES CELSIUS. THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE, AND URGENT ACTION IS NEEDED.

HERE, IN THE ARCTIC, THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ARE VISIBLE AND TANGIBLE. IN GREENLAND OUR FISHERMEN AND HUNTERS EXPERIENCE INCREASED DIFFICULTIES SUSTAINING THEIR TRADITIONAL LIFESTYLE AS THE ICE RECEDES AND THE SNOW COVER DISAPPEARS.

WE EXPERIENCE CHANGES HAPPENING FASTER THAN EVER. EVERY YEAR GLOBAL WARMING PUSHES THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN CLIMATE ZONES ALMOST 2 KILOMETERS TO THE NORTH. THE ENTIRE CLIMATE ZONE CALLED THE “HIGH ARCTIC” IS CURRENTLY IN DANGER OF DISAPPEARING FOR GOOD.

THE LATEST IPCC REPORT DOCUMENTS THE CONTINUOUS MELTING OF GLACIERS IN THE ARCTIC, AND THE GREENLAND ICE SHEET IN PARTICULAR. THIS MELTING WILL IMPACT ON OTHER VULNERABLE SOCIETIES FAR FROM THE ARCTIC. SEA LEVEL RISE WILL POSE GREAT RISKS TO LOW LYING COUNTRIES AND CITIES ALL OVER THE WORLD.

IN ORDER TO SOLVE A GLOBAL PROBLEM, WE NEED RENEWED GLOBAL EFFORTS FAST.
THE UN-NEGOTIATIONS NOW PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE WORLD SOCIETY TO AGREE ON A GLOBAL AND LEGALLY BINDING AGREEMENT IN 2015. IT IS VITAL THAT WE STRIVE TO MAKE THIS 2015-AGREEMENT AS AMBITIOUS AS POSSIBLE.

ALL COUNTRIES HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY, BUT I BELIEVE, THAT WE - THE ARCTIC COMMUNITIES - HAVE A SPECIAL STAKE IN ACHIEVING A NEW GLOBAL AGREEMENT. WE MUST CARRY OUR EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS TO THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY AND CALL FOR ACTION. A UNITED VOICE FROM THE ARCTIC IS AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE GLOBAL NEGOTIATIONS.

DURING THESE YEARS, WORLD ATTENTION IS FOCUSING INCREASINGLY ON THE ARCTIC AND ON GREENLAND.

MANY FACTORS ARE AT PLAY HERE. BUT MANY ARE CONSEQUENCES OF THE INCREASING TEMPERATURES WHICH HAVE MADE RESOURCES ACCESSIBLE WHICH WERE UNTIL RECENTLY BEYOND REACH:

- IMPORTANT ARCTIC SEALANES ARE OPENING: NORTH OF RUSSIA AND NORTH OF CANADA.

- THE POLAR SEA ITSELF IS OPENING UP TO FISHING.

- OFF-SHORE OIL AND GAS RESOURCES ARE BEING CHARTED AND EXPLORED.

AND

- MINERALS ON LAND ARE BECOMING COMMERCIALY INTERESTING TO EXPLOIT.

CLIMATE CHANGE IS TRANSFORMING THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT IN MANY WAYS. ONE SIXTH OF THE WORLD’S TOTAL LANDMASS IS
SITUATED ABOVE THE ARCTIC CIRCLE, AND MORE AND MORE OF THIS LANDMASS AND ADJOINING SEAS ARE NOW BECOMING ACCESSIBLE. WITH GREENLAND MAKING UP AROUND 20% OF THE ARCTIC LANDMASS, WE ARE AT THE CENTRE OF MUCH OF THIS ATTENTION:

- GREENLAND HAS SIGNIFICANT UNEXPLORERED MINERAL, OIL AND GAS RESOURCES, INCLUDING AN ESTIMATED 25% OF THE POTENTIAL SUPPLY OF RARE EARTH ELEMENTS GLOBALLY.

AND

- GREENLAND IS SITUATED STRATEGICALLY IN RELATION TO NEW AND EMERGING SEALINKS, WHICH IS ONE REASON WE ARE SUBSTANTIALLY UPGRADING THE ATLANTIC HARBOUR ON THE GREENLANDIC WESTCOAST - IN NUIUK – OVER THE COMING YEARS.

THESE DEVELOPMENTS WHICH ARE GLOBAL AND REGIONAL REQUIRE STRONG MULTILATERAL SOLUTIONS AT THE GLOBAL AND THE REGIONAL LEVELS. THIS IS WHY WE IN THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK STRONGLY SUPPORT:

- THE UN PROCESS ON CLIMATE CHANGE.

- THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE LAW OF THE SEAS.

AND

- THE FINALISATION - UNDER THE INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANISATION - OF A COMPULSORY POLAR CODE

THE ARCTIC COUNCIL REMAINS THE KEY REGIONAL BODY FOR CREATING SOLUTIONS TO THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED, AND THE COUNCIL HAS DEMONSTRATED ITS ABILITY TO ACT IN RECENT YEARS, IN PARTICULAR WITH THE:
- Conclusion of the Oil Spill Agreement of 2013, which strengthens exchange of information and assistance in case of oil spills in the Arctic Oceans.

And

- The Search and Rescue Agreement of 2011, which strengthens the coordination of rescue efforts and thereby ensures the fastest possible assistance from neighboring search and rescue authorities.

We now need collectively in the Arctic context to do more and do better to deal with the risks that new activities and pressures in the Arctic pose, in particular regarding maritime safety, mapping, oil spill preparedness and management of migratory fish stocks.

In relation to fish stocks and new access to the Polar Sea, the five Arctic coastal states can have a significant and complementary role to play in addition to the Arctic Council, in starting the necessary discussions on regulating new resources, and in gathering the required data for making sound and sustainable decisions.

In addition to contributing to regional Arctic responses to global challenges, Greenland will increasingly also be expected to contribute independently in response to global challenges.

In responding to the challenge of climate change, the development of renewable energy sources is and will remain vital.

At the national level, Greenland is committed to continuing our development of renewable energy sources – with hydropower now accounting for more than 70% of our domestic electricity production.
AT THE SAME TIME, WE ARE DEVELOPING OUR MINERAL, OIL AND GAS RESOURCES, AS A BASIS FOR A FUTURE INDEPENDENT GREENLANDIC ECONOMY.

NUCLEAR POWER CONTINUES IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD TO HAVE AN IMPORTANT PLACE, AS PART OF THE NECESSARY NON-FOSSIL FUEL ENERGY MIX, IN REDUCING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS.

ON 24 OCTOBER, THE GREENLANDIC PARLIAMENT WILL TAKE A VERY IMPORTANT DECISION ON ABOLISHING THE “ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICY TOWARDS URANIUM”, WHICH HAS BEEN IN PLACE FOR THE PAST 25 YEARS IN GREENLAND.

THIS DECISION WILL PAVE THE WAY:

- FOR GREENLAND TO EXPLOIT ITS RARE EARTH ELEMENTS, THE DEPOSITS OF WHICH ARE OFTEN LINKED WITH URANIUM AND OTHER RADIOACTIVE MINERALS.

AND

- IT WILL ALSO PAVE THE WAY FOR GREENLAND IN A NOT-SO-DISTANT FUTURE TO BECOME A SIGNIFICANT URANIUM EXPORTER – AMONG THE WORLD’S TOP-10 OR POSSIBLY TOP-5.

NUCLEAR POWER IS ONE OF THE REAL MITIGATION OPTIONS AVAILABLE IN DEALING WITH CLIMATE CHANGE TODAY.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE STRENGTHEN OUR EFFORTS COLLECTIVELY TO USE OUR ARCTIC EXPERIENCES TO ENGAGE THE WIDER PUBLIC ABOUT THE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES OF ANTHROPOGENIC GLOBAL WARMING.
AND IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY COLLECTIVELY AS ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ARCTIC NATIONS TO TAKE THE NECESSARY DECISIONS, WHILE THERE IS STILL TIME.

IN 2009, GREENLAND ACHIEVED “SELF-GOVERNMENT” STATUS WITHIN THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK. THE “SELF-GOVERNMENT” LAW AMONGST OTHER THINGS RECOGNISES THAT THE GREENLANDIC PEOPLE ARE A PEOPLE UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THEREFORE HAVE THE ESTABLISHED RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION.

GREENLAND IS THEREFORE TODAY IN THE UNIQUE POSITION OF BEING THE ONLY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN THE ARCTIC, WHICH HAS ITS OWN GOVERNMENT THAT HAS A RECOGNISED AND AGREED RIGHT TO INDEPENDENCE.

UNDER THE SELF-GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT, GREENLAND CAN TAKE OVER COMPETENCE IN MOST AREAS. BUT NOT OVER SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY.

IN 2010 GREENLAND TOOK OVER THE SOLE COMPETENCE FROM DENMARK OVER OIL AND GAS AND MINERAL RESOURCES.

THE NECESSARY TRANSFORMATION OF THE GREENLANDIC ECONOMY TOWARDS MINING AND OIL AND GAS-RELATED ACTIVITIES WILL REQUIRE HUGE INVESTMENTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND INCREASED MOBILITY.

MY PERSONAL OBJECTIVE IS THAT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT WILL TAKE THE NECESSARY STEPS, WHICH WILL ENABLE GREENLAND TO ACHIEVE INDEPENDENCE ONE DAY WITHIN MY LIFETIME.

CLOSE COOPERATION WITH GREENLAND’S INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS IN THIS PROCESS IS OF VITAL IMPORTANCE.

MY GOVERNMENT WILL IN PARTICULAR PRIORITISE CLOSE COOPERATION WITH ITS INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS TO ENSURE
SUPPORT TO GLOBAL EFFORTS WHERE THIS IS SPECIFICALLY RELEVANT TO THE ARCTIC:

-SUCH AS FOR CLIMATE CHANGE.

-SUCH AS FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

-SUCH AS FOR ENSURING STRONG MARITIME RULES.

AS WELL AS:

-FOR THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF MARINE WILDLIFE.

AT THE MULTILATERAL LEVEL, THE ARCTIC COUNCIL WILL REMAIN THE MOST IMPORTANT REGIONAL FORUM FOR GREENLAND, AND THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK WILL WORK IN CONCERT TO STRENGTHEN THE COUNCIL FURTHER, DURING THE PRESENT CANADIAN CHAIRMANSHIP.

PEOPLE HAVE LIVED IN GREENLAND FOR THE PAST 4500 YEARS. CONDITIONS - ALSO CLIMATIC - HAVE CHANGED DRAMATICALLY OVER THE COURSE OF THIS HISTORY BEFORE.

WE, AS A PEOPLE IN GREENLAND, ARE READY TO ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE OF AN ARCTIC THAT IS OPENING UP TO THE WORLD, AND TO ACCEPT THE NEW RESPONSIBILITIES THIS BRINGS.

I HOPE THAT OVER THE COMING TWO DAYS, WE WILL HAVE PRODUCTIVE DISCUSSIONS AND THAT NEW AND IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS WILL BE BUILT.

I AGREE WITH PRESIDENT GRIMSSON, THAT RAPID CHANGES IN THE ARCTIC MAKE THE “ARCTIC CIRCLE” A NECESSARY FORUM. AND I BELIEVE THIS FORUM CAN HELP SUBSTANTIALLY STRENGTHEN THE EXISTING DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN THE ARCTIC.
I WISH YOU ALL A GOOD CONFERENCE.

THANK YOU.