



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

International Experts Meeting

**Climate Change
and Arctic Sustainable Development :
scientific, social, cultural and educational challenges**

3-6 March 2009, Monaco

**ABSTRACT:
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS**

Ann Andreasen

Leader of the Children's home in Uummanaq
Director of UPI – Uummanaq Polar Institute (Art, Culture, Nature and People)
Greenland Home Rule Government
GREENLAND

On Thin Ice

My field of work is dealing with children and young people with difficult social backgrounds. These kids and their families are mainly a product of the rapid changes in the Arctic during the last 50 years. I work very closely together with local hunters and fishermen in the treatment of these children and young people. Through UPI, I also have had close contact with foreign scientists and research teams working with pollution and climate changes.

In the beginning the problems related to our work were caused by changes in culture and technology, but within the last 10 - 15 years the changes have also included climate changes, which is more of a problem today than the cultural and technological changes. Also the increase of pollution in the traditional Greenlandic food sources, such as seal and whale has become a major problem. People must earn more money to buy foreign food or risk getting sick if they continue to eat only traditional food.

As it is right now, for many people in Greenland, especially in the small villages and settlements in the outer regions, the only way to earn a living and support a family is fishing and hunting. Due to climate change this way of living has become more and more difficult. The lack of sea ice in winter and spring, and a generally more unstable weather with heavy unpredictable storms that often last for days have made the work as a hunter and fisherman very hard and dangerous, and make it difficult to live and even survive in the arctic.

If the families stay in the small villages or settlements they must endure periods of unemployment, which means very little money or even starvation. Because of this some start to abuse alcohol when times get tough and over time they get addicted.

This leads to social and personal disasters, with the children as the big losers.

Due to the generally low level of school education is it hard for these families to get jobs in the bigger cities further south on the coast. If they choose to move or get deported as a result of their settlements closing down, they often end up in ghettos abusing alcohol and then fail to raise their children well.

The dilemma for these people is easy to spot but not so easy to deal with. Their pride and traditional culture keeps many alive but it is a struggle and if it lasts for many years, even some of the most stubborn will break.

My tribute to the conference will be a movie called "Silent Snow". It shows the situation and worries of today's people living in the arctic area, with climate changes and pollution as the main themes. The movie lasts about 13 minutes; it is in Greenlandic with English subtitles.

Recommendations:

- Stopping climate change and pollution is not something that is possible to do overnight. It will take many years of hard work, if it is even possible in our lifetime. With this in mind I think that it is important not to just sit back and wait for these changes to come. We need action to be taken as soon as possible to make life more feasible in the arctic. We need to help arctic people to a better life under the influence of climate change, which is already a reality.
- For arctic people this task is out of their own hands. They are the victims of a global problem and need help to overcome the devastating conditions of their daily life.
- One way to help these people is education. If they were better educated they could get access to jobs that are not dependent on weather and climate conditions or they could get jobs in the bigger cities. Furthermore education makes people feel more important, and more valued, which gives strength for them to endure some of the harsh times.
- While being educated it can be difficult to support a family because of the low fee you get from the Government. This makes some people to choose not to have an education, which leaves them with only one choice; to live a life where they are dependent on the weather and rapidly changing climate conditions. Therefore there is a need for some better conditions during the period of education.
- One of the options for Greenland could be an IT based industry, with programming, graphic design, animation and so on. For this to work there is a need for computers, education and knowledge in this field. This work could be performed even if you live in a small town or settlement, but will require education and proper internet connections.
- For a better educational level an improvement of language skills is also needed, primary Danish and English. But also other languages such as French and German can provide jobs in the tourist industry which is growing at present in Greenland and the arctic region in general.
- Last but not least, I believe that the knowledge gathered by scientists and researchers, should be more available to the public worldwide. If we do not implement this knowledge into the life of ordinary people then what good does it do? We need to make the general public more aware of the catastrophic and rapid changes in order for them to choose a more appropriate lifestyle, with less pollution.

My keywords to changes are better education for the arctic people, and more information to the public worldwide.