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ABSTRACT: CIRCUMPOLAR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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Sustainable Development of the Arctic in the face of Global Climate Change seen from a Greenlandic viewpoint

Due to global climate change the Arctic, including Greenland, has experienced an enormous change in attention from the rest of the world, from being almost non-existent on the international political arena to being the focus of political fora and medias all over the world.

Greenland can only welcome this attention. It gives us new opportunities to explain to the world what life in the Arctic means and thereby attract foreign expertise and finance to help us develop our part of the Globe.

Greenland has for thousands of years lived of and on the Sea. Hunting marine mammals and fishing has been the only way to survive in the harsh climate. It's less than three hundred years since the Europeans (Scandinavians) came to our shores and brought with them what is today known as urbanisation. Today about 60.000 people live in towns and settlements – but we see a very clear trend – the young people wants to live in bigger communities than before. Today our capital Nuuk houses about 25 % of the whole population

So the traditional hunters' and fishermen's community will disappear in the foreseeable future especially because climate change will speed up this development. It is very simple – no sea-ice, no seals, walruses, polar bears etc. In this respect the traditional hunters are part of the food chain.

But also international focus on marine mammals in respect of misunderstood protection plays a serious role. Wealthy animal welfare organisations have over the last 25 years focused on seal and whales and created a media hysteria which eventually will force the EU to pass legislation banning the use of seal products in the European Market and also bring a stop to our traditional whaling.

Not only does this mean that about 20 % of our population will have to find

new occupations, but also that the basis for our culture will vanish – and again the world becomes more uniform and culturally poorer.

We may still have a fishery in the future. Right now we depend on shrimp and Greenland halibut, but both stocks are fragile. We still wait for the cod to return in sufficient amounts for industrial fishery, but also here Climate Change plays a major role. Even small changes in water temperature can be of significant importance for the fish stocks.

My conclusion is therefore that we must find new alternative ways to create a basis for human existence in the Arctic. This –of course – is easier said than done, but it is not impossible. Let me give some examples:

It has been known for decades that Greenland has a very big mineral potential, and so far we have only knowledge about less than 5 % of the ice-free land. The present melting of the Ice Cap opens up new areas and mining companies from abroad show a still growing interest. We may face a temporary hold or even set back because of the international financial crisis but I am sure that we will see a number of operating mines within the next ten years.

Both mines and industries related to minerals need lots of energy. In Greenland we have invested heavily in hydro power. The capital Nuuk's need for electric power is today fully covered by hydro power and two more hydro power plants will be in operation shortly. This will give basis for new industries that can utilize among other things our enormous resources of freshwater.

It is also known that the Arctic holds hydrocarbon resources in a very big scale: This also is the case for Greenland. Climate change make access to these resources easier, so it is just a question of time before exploitation starts.

For Greenland it is a must – it is beyond discussion – that all these different kinds of operations are carried out in balance with the nature. Protecting the environment and ensuring sustainability are priority goals for Greenland. We know better than anyone else how fragile our nature is and we want to keep it.