

Opening Address

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Your Royal Highness,
Mr President of the Sami Parliament,
Mrs Deputy Minister,
Distinguished Northern Residents,
Distinguished invited speakers, session chairs and rapporteurs,
Delegates and colleagues :

Today is a day that I did not know would come until little more than half a year ago, in fact as late as May this year. And even then it seemed hard to believe that I would stand here and address more than a hundred dedicated delegates to a workshop on Sustained Arctic Observing Networks in Stockholm in November.

Yet I am – and it is my great pleasure and also an honour to bid you welcome to Stockholm on behalf of the Swedish National Committee for the International Polar Year and on behalf of the Workshop Organizing Committee.

It was only in late winter and early spring this year that word was out that the Arctic Council following the Salakhard Declaration in the fall of 2006 had taken the initiative to move ahead with long standing and very important issues on Arctic monitoring and observing networks.

The timing was absolutely right. Climate change was demonstrably getting more sinister – and it was reaching a point in politics and in the media when it was obvious that moves toward swift and firm action was not only needed but that they were also likely to be met with success.

An Initiating Group was formed for SAON with dedicated and absolutely top class experts from a range of the most salient organizations.

In February and March we understood, in the wider IPY community and also in our Swedish national committee, that this was a window of opportunity to bring important issues giant steps forward and at the same time create a legacy for IPY in issues that answer to all possible interests: local, indigenous, environmental, social, economic, scientific.

In the Swedish IPY-committee we seized the opportunity and after some discussions in particular with our Canadian colleagues in their IPY committee we decided to take a joint initiative. In the course of events the Finns followed and we are now looking forward to a sequence of three workshops in order to follow the complex issues of Arctic observing networks through from identification of user needs and inventories of what we have already got in place and what we need to develop further and what we need to set up because it does not exist – issues that we will be focusing on during this meeting – through to issues of implementation, financing, international agreements, diplomacy and issues of maintenance, data storing and sharing and issues of, not least important, availability among different user groups across the Arctic and around the world.

So, in a sense it is not so surprising that there are so many of you that have travelled to Stockholm – it is an important event.

It takes place this first day of sessions in these magnificent and interesting facilities, the Nordiska Museet. It is one of the largest single, stand alone buildings in Stockholm, started in the 1890's and finished in 1907, so we are also here for a centennial. The museum, including the Skansen outdoor museum, was the brainchild of Arthur Hazelius, a cultural nationalist and a founding father of a range of public festivals and celebrations – and an avid collector; it was his private collections which formed the backbone of the museum in its early years. Now it has expanded to a leading facility for research on cultural history and ethnography and a quite popular museum for temporary exhibitions.

We are grateful to the Nordiska Museet that we can use their facilities today.

What SAON attempts to do in the Arctic is something quite unique. Sharing data, cooperation across the eight Arctic nations and involving several more nations with interests in and concerns for the Arctic, such things do not regularly occur in this world. SAON certainly fits into the wider world of observing systems of oceans, climate, and other geophysical features. Indeed, our predecessor, the International Geophysical Year of 1957-58, left a crucial legacy with the data that generation of researchers collected, and notably with the international data centres that were set up.

We belong in that great tradition, but today our global research presence has increased and the technologies at our disposal have developed immensely. We *can* do so much more – and it is now that we have the chance to prove that we *will* do it.

Another IGY legacy that comes to mind is the Antarctic Treaty. That was a major achievement, evidence of what scientific cooperation can achieve, when politics is cooperative. It is considerably more difficult to arrive at concluding and binding regimes for the Arctic where geopolitical stakes are both rooted in the past and acute as they are today.

But precisely because that is the case, we should be active seeking solutions that involve softer and middle range means, those that we call governance. This does not of course exclude a process leading to new geopolitical regimes in the Arctic in the future – that is an issue for another forum than this, however. What we can do is to work towards doable, robust governance schemes for the data and the knowledge that all rational governing and all management will ultimately rely upon.

Thus we will be providing towards the greater whole and to a sustainable Arctic at large.

I am particularly happy to note, being a humanist scholar myself and with my roots in Swedish Lapland – an Arctic resident by any definition – that this IPY and also the SAON initiative have strong elements that relate directly to the welfare and livelihoods of people.

I would like to draw your attention to the report, *Toward an Integrated Arctic Observing Network*, that has been produced at the request of the American National Science Foundation under a special committee and was published in 2006. In this report we can read the following on how, precisely, the current climate change affects Arctic residents and economic activities:

Many of the rapid changes being experienced in the Arctic have impacts on society and especially on people who live there (Krupnik and Jolly, 2002; Huntington and Fox, 2005). Arctic residents are economically, ethnically, and culturally diverse, and while the impacts of environmental change depend on local circumstances, the costs often have geographic and societal effects. For example, in

communities located along receding shorelines, increased coastal erosion is commonplace because of more frequent and severe storms and decreased protection by sea ice, with subsequent ecological and economic costs. Communities and industries (e.g., oil and natural gas extractors) that depend on winter ice roads are losing transportation flexibility as the length of the winter season shrinks (NRC, 2003). Thawing permafrost will damage roads and buildings over wide areas (Nelson et al., 2001, 2002).

That should caution us not to be too narrow when we conceive of what kind of data and what kinds of observing activities we shall be pursuing.

Understanding of the need to widen our scope is growing and concrete steps in that direction are already taken, in the different Arctic nations and internationally. Only last month the Arctic Council announced that a new website had opened, called the *ArcticStat*.

I quote from its website:

ArcticStat is a permanent, public and independent statistical database dealing with the countries, regions and populations of the Circumpolar Arctic.

ArcticStat was born out of the desire to facilitate comparative research on the socioeconomic conditions of the peoples of the Arctic by bringing together already existing data which are dispersed and often hard to find.

I have over the last few days browsed some of the databases that ArcticStat contains. It is a great pleasure to be able to compare easily issues of education, health, demography, across the Arctic.

The facility is recent and there is still room for improvement. I fail to find figures of literacy. Historical data are lacking. In terms of education I found a lot about the funding of private day care centers in northern Norway but only scattered information on higher education.

I am convinced that the many research projects that are part of the IPY will remedy some of the lack of data and will identify more issues to cover with data – like research almost always does. These are long term processes, we are building assets for the future. In the not too distant future we will have been able to build a legacy of data and observing that would have been almost inconceivable only years ago – and in the past were conjured up only by visionaries and utopians.

When I think back on these issues in my own personal life I always recall when I was fourteen and received a school stipend. It was only a small one, a one year subscription of the then new and now leading popular science magazine in Sweden, *Forskning & Framsteg*, “Research & Progress” in English, a title signalling the kind of optimism that in the post war decades so effortlessly surrounded science. After this first year I kept it for several more years, at my own (or rather my parents’) own cost. It was in one of those years in my late teens that I came across an article about Judge Thomas Berger’s *Mackenzie River Valley Pipeline Report*. It talked of his inquiries with local residents in the North and how these talks had been communicated by television to homes and offices all over Canada, and how his inquiry had become the talk of the town everywhere.

In essence what Berger did was that he used modern technology in the service of society and of the people in concern. He created in a small way an observation network, he transmitted data, live voices from real people. It was sensational. His *Report* won prizes and he made history in how to perform a public inquiry.

I later came to learn personally his very skilful editor, the remarkable Arctic scholar and book collector Alan Cooke, who assured me that the editing was also of the essence. And perhaps that is just what it is – we need to be people of different skills together if our enormously complex enterprise should work.

Once again, it is a great pleasure for me to bid you all welcome. I do so as co-chair of Workshop Organizing Committee. It consists of my co-chair Kjell Danell, also a member of the Swedish National IPY committee, and of David Carlson, head of the IPO office, David Hik, who heads the Canadian IPY office in Edmonton and will coordinate the next workshop in this series, and finally of John Calder at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

I wish you all a successful workshop!

Thank you!