

Speech by Ms. Juliane Henningsen (IA), SCPAR meeting in Ottawa, Nov 2010

I have recently returned from maternal leave and would like to thank you for having welcomed Mrs. Sofia Rossen during my absence. I am pleased to take up our important work again here in Ottawa.

Greenland is taking up more and more space in the international media – mainly due to the promising findings of oil in the Disco Bay. The future prospects of extracting the oil are looking good. And we find ourselves ready to take on the responsibility that comes with the oil extractions – especially when it comes to the protection of the environment. Our security standards are among the highest in the world.

Our mining industry is also developing rapidly and will create an estimated thousand new jobs over the next five years. The financial injection that the oil- and mineral industry can altogether give our economy, our welfare and peripheral regions is much needed.

We are, of course, affected by the global economic recession as is everyone else. The need to develop a stronger economy and a more competitive industry – especially the fishing industry – is crucial if we are to succeed in becoming self-reliant as an economy and as a nation. This is a major challenge for us.

The new Self-Rule Government is, nonetheless, undertaking ambitious economic and social reforms to prepare the Greenlandic society for an easier and more prosperous future. A natural starting point for this is to strengthen our youngest population. Over the years we have received criticism for not tackling child poverty and child abuse. The criticism has been justified. Therefore, the new Self-Rule Government is doing everything it can to help. We have started revising our laws to give children maximum legal protection. We are allocating large sums of money into the work and welfare of children. And we have intensified the cooperation with Unicef and local childrens' organisations around Greenland.

We are also investing in the young population through education. The number of young Greenlanders applying to enter the university has risen by more than 30 percent since 2005. This is of course a very positive development in light of the fact that we will have a rising need for skilled and well-educated labour in the future.

The self-Rule Government and the Danish Government are at the moment working on a common Arctic political strategy. The strategy shall include solutions for the future challenges in the Arctic – especially with regard to the human and environmental risks associated with increased shipping and search for oil and minerals in our seas. Also, the strategy shall focus on specific protection measures with respect to the right of the indigenous Arctic populations and their right to sustainable development.

As you are aware, the European Union is giving the Arctic Region more attention than ever before. The Parliament has drafted a report on “a sustainable EU policy for the High North”. It focuses on much the same challenges to human and environmental conditions caused by the mentioned increase in shipping and oil extraction in the Arctic. I am pleased that the EU shows promise and willingness to cooperate with us in the creation of the best future for the Arctic.

At this point we have various strategies for the Arctic elaborated by different international and regional political fora and different national parliaments. But the extent to which all these strategies are coordinated or share the same goals for the Arctic region is uncertain. I would therefore like us to discuss later today whether – and how – this Committee should take on the task of gathering and coordinating the various national and international strategies and goals concerning the Arctic. That would bring us closer to having common ground for addressing common challenges in the future.

Thank you!