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Meeting of International Experts on the Establishment of an Arctic Council, Ottawa, 19-20 May 1993.

Opening Statement from the Norwegian Delegation.

Madam Chairman,

On behalf of my delegation and on behalf of the Norwegian government, I would like to express our sincere appreciation and thanks to the government of Canada for having invited us here to Ottawa to continue our preparatory discussions on the establishment of an Arctic Council.

Norway has long polar traditions and significant interests in the Arctic regions. We also have a strong tradition of supporting and promoting international cooperation, globally as well as on regional levels.

The past few years have witnessed improved opportunities for governmental cooperation on Arctic issues as well as a greater awareness of the need to address regional problems which do not respect national jurisdictions. Obvious examples are environmental problems such as trans-boundary pollution. Thus, the challenge to preserve the Arctic environment has been taken up through the establishment of the international environmental cooperation within the Rovaniemi-process. Environmental challenges as well as other regional cooperation needs are being addressed within a considerable number and variety of initiatives - circumpolar as well as on subregional

or bilateral levels - which have been undertaken in recent years. As a most recent example, special mention may be made of the Euro-Arctic Barents cooperation, which was launched at a Foreign Ministers meeting in Kirkenes in Northern Norway on 11 January 1993, with a declaration signed by Russia and the Nordic countries as well as by the EC Commission.

The multitude of regional initiatives, processes and cooperation fora highlights the need for coordination as well as for avoiding duplication of efforts. Both should be borne in mind during our deliberations concerning the tasks, the scope and the structure of the proposed Arctic Council.

The Canadian proposal to establish an Arctic Council has met with a positive response and support from the Norwegian government, - a support which was reiterated during the exploratory talks here in Ottawa a year ago as well as in subsequent contacts with Canadian representatives. We are prepared to proceed here today and contribute constructively to the preparatory exercise which need to be completed in order to bring the concept of an Arctic Council into fruition. In the view of the Norwegian government, it is essential that this process includes the active and full participation of the governments of all the Arctic states. This stipulation was also underlined in the joint statement of the Nordic Ministers of Foreign Affairs from their meeting in Longyearbyen, Svalbard, on 27 August 1992: "The ministers expressed their hope that the Canadian initiative aimed at establishing an Arctic Council as a forum for cooperation for the governments of the 8 Arctic countries will be followed up in a way that all the relevant governments can endorse".

Madam Chairman, with these considerations having been duly emphasized, I would like once more to confirm Norway's support for the Arctic Council initiative. Especially, I would like to commend our Canadian hosts for their continuing and constructive efforts to accomplish this worthwhile and ambitious goal. To this end, they have provided us with thoroughly prepared documents which we have studied with great interest, and which will form the basis for discussions which hopefully will enable us to make further progress towards that goal. We are confronted with a challenging task. Together with the other Arctic countries and peoples, Norway is ready to contribute to bringing this process to a successful conclusion.