

*2nd UArctic Congress
Opening ceremony – Helsinki, 4th September 2018*

Mr Prime Minister,
Madam Mayor,
Chancellors,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,

First of all, I would like to express my satisfaction at being here for this second UArctic Congress, an initiative which is particularly close to my heart and which I am pleased to have been supporting for many years.

Over and above the very many merits of the University of the Arctic, on which I will elaborate further in a moment, this second Congress provides an opportunity to discuss the future of the Arctic in an inclusive and global manner, taking on board various issues and involving numerous players.

Because one of the basic problems faced by this region is, as is often the case with environmental issues, a lack of global vision, the challenge of coordinated commitment, and consequently the absence of an appropriate strategy.

This is easily explained.

We are dependent on political institutions, economic mechanisms and philosophical visions which are insufficiently adapted to the new challenges posed to us by the environment.

Our political institutions are primarily organized around borders beyond which environmental issues most often obviously extend.

Our economic mechanisms are structured around a vision focused on the short term. We neglect the imperatives of nature, whose resources are too often considered as having no value.

And our philosophical visions are dominated by the idea that we would be able, at least partially, to disregard our environment, with no concern for its preservation.

All these issues are particularly acute in the Arctic because the Region is at the crossroads of the majority of environmental issues known to us.

Firstly, in political terms, the Arctic is distinct in that it crosses various States, all of which have specific rights and obligations over it, and at the same time it is a key issue for the whole planet.

In economic terms too, the Region is currently at a crossroads. Its resources are increasingly accessible and are regarded as increasingly valuable commodities, but their exploitation poses ever increasing risks.

Finally, philosophically speaking, we oscillate between two views.

We understand that the Arctic is not an unchangeable and infinite expanse in which humanity is fragile and threatened.

We understand that we are the danger, and that the Arctic is at risk.

It is vital that we address this risk using all the tools we have available.

Global tools, starting with action to combat climate change, which is the root cause of most of the dangers threatening the Arctic.

Local tools too, especially conservation mechanisms for these areas whose specific nature calls for specific protections.

Political tools, whether they be the responsibility of multilateral, regional, national or local institutions.

Economic tools, which are essential for the implementation of a new development paradigm. Because only a new development paradigm is capable of preserving the Arctic's wealth, of using some of its resources sustainably, and of offering its inhabitants a future which does not involve the destruction and the weakening of their ecosystems.

And scientific tools of course, which are vital for gaining a better understanding of the current situation and the efforts this requires.

As far as this latter point is concerned, it was in this sense that I submitted to the IPCC a draft interim report specifically devoted to the oceans and frozen regions of the Globe, of which the Arctic obviously is a vital part.

It is essential that we gain better knowledge of these regions if we want to take effective action in their interest. I am delighted that this project was accepted and that the report was initiated in Monaco almost two years ago. Its conclusions, which will also be rendered in Monaco in a year's time, will be of particular value to us.

We therefore have the tools to take action. However, tools alone are not enough: in order for them to deliver their full potential, a more radical change is necessary.

There firstly needs to be a change in mentality, before a change in institutions.

This is the change that the University of the Arctic is promoting. That is the reason why I am so pleased to be able to take part in this Congress today. And it is the reason why I am pleased that my Foundation has been a partner of your institution for several years.

The University of the Arctic embodies the desire to bring together stakeholders, partners and inhabitants around a common project, for the benefit of a common need.

Because in addition to the various aspects I have just mentioned and the various levels of action, a common reality well and truly exists, in the Arctic and beyond, which is capable of uniting and mobilizing goodwill. There is a common goal for all of us: to ensure the future of human society, with it and for it.

The future of those who live here and who need to address the key issues that I have just spoken about. They need to be the leading players in the preservation of this region, to understand that such preservation is not in contradiction with their current development, nor with their immediate or future well-being.

The future also of those living elsewhere on our Planet, and who, although further away from the Arctic, are no less dependent on it. They too need to understand the crucial issue represented by the future of these regions and the preservation of their natural balance.

To achieve this radical change, the University of the Arctic is placed in a key position. It is capable of bringing together and pooling talent in order to conduct projects in a flexible and pertinent manner, based on a partnership approach, with the focus on concrete targets. In this respect, it is an excellent tool serving the interests of the Arctic and its populations. In the interests of their sustainable future.

And it also offers a framework enabling students and scientists from other regions of the world to gain a better understanding of issues relating to the Arctic and to those who live there, to better integrate them into of their vision of the world.

It is therefore important that it continues to bring together the various players involved in the future of these regions. It is important that it forms a common pool which will enable them to work together, to share a common vision and values, to get to know each other better and to establish a coherent network.

In this respect, I consider it to be particularly relevant that this second Congress is being organized within the context of the Finnish Presidency of the Arctic Council, and in reference to the United Nations sustainable development agenda. And I am delighted to see that it has brought together so many prominent figures, whose cooperation is undoubtedly the best thing we could wish for the Arctic...and for the world as a whole.

As Professor Jean Malaurie, a great connoisseur and staunch defender of the Polar region said, “undoubtedly the sustainable development of the Arctic is one of the greatest challenges offered to the United Nations, to all its related agencies, to all the Academies of Science and Universities of the largest sovereign countries (...).Such is the challenge: to develop nature, but also to protect it, without ever forgetting the traditional communities that live there, over and above the ever-increasing immigrant groups that form a new people of the North.”

Nature and humanity, science and technology, indigenous peoples and those who have just moved here, the neighboring States and humankind as a whole: we now need to reconcile all of the latter, and this is what the University of the Arctic makes possible.

That is why I was eager to be here today and to express my hopes and my expectations. To all of those who, like me, like you, like us all, are committed to the future of this magnificent region.

To the future of our Planet.

Thank you.