

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Twenty-four hours after my arrival in your magnificent region, I wanted to tell you what a pleasure it is for me to be with you today.

As you may know, my links to the Poles are very close, longstanding and deep-rooted.

They result from a long family tradition: over a hundred years ago, my great-great-grandfather Prince Albert I was one of the first Western Heads of State to explore the Arctic. For him, this expedition, led in obviously difficult conditions, was a true revelation. He learned the importance of those extraordinary areas whose study was and remains indispensable for scientific progress and for the equilibrium of humankind in general.

I believe this 'scholar Prince,' as he was then called, bequeathed to me an acute awareness of the fragility of the mechanisms to which we owe our existence on Earth.

The Poles, which concentrate such beauty, power and vulnerability all at the same time, obviously occupy a very special place among such wonders.

This is why I undertook an expedition to the Arctic in 2006 and another to Antarctica three years later.

These two extraordinary adventures were an opportunity to meet scientists working in these harsh reaches. They also enabled me to observe for myself the immense destruction wrought by our civilisation of overconsumption and wastefulness.

This observation is something I am now trying to share with others to draw its practical consequences. I do so through my Foundation, which is actively engaged in the conservation of Polar areas, and my experience and presence in the many places where I am invited to speak.

I seize every occasion to remind those around me how much we owe to Polar regions and the grave dangers that may soon threaten us if we persevere in our errors and recklessness.

But I also warn that the Arctic is much more than a natural zone that can be reduced to glaciers and polar bears.

As you, more than anyone else, well know are also, and above all, the stakes for the Arctic concern all humankind. Here, indeed, as elsewhere, devastation to the environment always entails misfortunes inflicted on humanity.

I am obviously thinking of the direct threats to the livelihood of native peoples whose natural resources shrink a little more each year. I am also thinking of the profound changes in social usages and mentalities, countless silent revolutions that alter equilibria and traditions inherited from these peoples' long past.

For these men and women the challenge is daunting, and they are often at a loss in the face of this.

Yet with their heritage, it is part of the cultural heritage of all humankind that is under threat. This is why we must help them.

We must help them preserve their surroundings. We must help them reconquer full control over their destinies.

It is in this spirit that my Foundation decided to join the EALAT UArctic programme that aims to mutualise, preserve and make better use of the skills and knowledge involved in reindeer husbandry. For this activity, with its ancient roots and current profound upheaval, it strikes me indeed as indispensable to support these peoples.

Peoples living in Arctic zones are faced with constraints that threaten their very presence on their own land. It must be remembered that, tomorrow, their perception of climate change can provide valuable assets for adaptation, both direct and indirect.

Direct: by preserving their economy based on herding, so essential for many peoples.

Indirect: by gathering and transmitting rare skills that could help us better respond to the effects of global warming.

Like many others, the EALAT UArctic project must enable us to obtain greater consideration for these populations to help them in our world's political and economic rules of the game.

To that end, it is essential to provide training for new generations so they can assert their rights in the face of the constraints and opportunities of our globalised civilisation.

This issue is crucial and the University of the Arctic has an indispensable role to play.

This exceptional University offers a unique experiment in harmonious development turned towards the emancipation of people as well as the conservation of Nature.

Flexible, relevant, conducted with a partnership approach around concrete projects, it provides an invaluable instrument in the service of the Arctic and its peoples, as well as a framework for students and scientists from other parts of the world to learn more about the Arctic's key issues. This is why I am so proud to be able to bring my support through this partnership with my Foundation.

For me, the University of the Arctic is a model for the kind of initiative that can bring about genuine change. This means not only changing the direct situation of those who benefit from its teaching, but also changing the place of Arctic peoples in the world and recognising their indispensable role, in particular for the preservation of their homeland.

In the words of the philosopher Leibniz: "Change the system of education and you will change the face of the world."

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Today, it is urgent for all humankind that we uphold conservation of Polar areas.

We need to muster all goodwill to achieve this. But, most of all, we will need yours.

The world needs the Arctic, its peoples and its University.

Thank you.