

Mr Prime Minister,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

I am particularly pleased to be here today.

With the passing months and years, the discussions and studies on the Arctic Region have proven their relevance and importance. They also confirm the positive involvement of each of us, our commitment, and that of the States and Institutions we represent, in favour of the Poles.

I am particularly satisfied with the mobilisation of the Government of the Russian Federation, and would like to pay tribute to the Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, and express my gratitude to the Russian Geographic Society for having taken the initiative of organising this meeting on "The Arctic: Territory of Dialogue".

For its geography, of course, but also for its size, power and influence, your country, Dear Vladimir, can only play an essential role in the preservation of the Arctic.

As has been regularly recalled in recent years in different contexts, in particular within the Aspen Institute Arctic Committee, in whose work my Foundation has been participating and many of whose members I am delighted to see here, the situation of Arctic zones requires an ambitious global response that can be effective only if it brings together all the States and organisations concerned.

I am thinking first, of course, of the eight circum-Arctic countries whose role is primordial. But this commitment must unite all good will on the Planet, since it touches on what is also common to humankind as a whole.

This is not a matter of challenging the sovereignty of the States located in the Arctic Circle. It is simply a need to recall that we must support their commitment all together. Support means we must stand by their side, whether by assisting them in the salvage initiatives they undertake, by shouldering the burden that weighs on the Polar zones and the people who live there because of the excesses of humanity, or by urging them to pursue when their determination seems to wane.

Today, the situation in the Arctic is particularly worrying.

We know the facts, all the effects, direct and indirect, of global warming whose effects are so tragic at the Poles. We also know that undermining the stability of these regions that act as temperature regulators for the Planet, further exacerbates climate change. We also know that these changes, especially the melting of ice, open new economic and commercial prospects for the exploitation of undersea resources and new maritime routes that are potential environmental threats for these regions.

Despite the growing awareness today of the stakes involved in global warming for the Arctic, these dangers are far from being circumscribed. On the contrary, they increase year after year, which means we must further intensify our efforts.

This is why, although some enjoy agitating vain polemic, I would like here to recall our duty to do our utmost to improve the conservation of these zones that are directly affected by global warming.

This means first pursuing our fight against global warming by resuming international negotiations with resolve and overcoming the disappointment we all felt in Copenhagen.

It also means acting there, alongside those who are already mobilised, especially the scientists and governments of the eight circum-Arctic countries.

Finally, it means helping the local populations that are often the first victims of the disruption generated by others.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is our duty to replace these populations at the heart of the debate, without ever forgetting that the crucial subject is and will always be humankind. Damage to the environment always entails misfortunes to humankind.

I am thinking, of course, of the direct harm to these people's environment, when they see their natural resources dwindle year after year. But I am also thinking of the profound changes in social customs and mentalities that disrupt the equilibria and traditions inherited from their long history.

For these men and women this represents a daunting challenge, which often leaves them helpless.

Yet with their heritage, it is also something of the cultural heritage of all humankind that is threatened. This is why we must help them.

I am thinking, for example, of the need to educate new elites, elites that must now be integrated in our global civilisation's network of constraints and opportunities. This is a vital issue for Arctic peoples, an issue around which we can act in coordination with them.

In this respect I am proud of the partnership between my Foundation and the University of the Arctic, which groups institutions from all the countries in the region, Russia in particular, of course. For me, the University of the Arctic is precisely the kind of project that must be encouraged: flexible, relevant, structured according to a rationale of partnership around concrete projects. It is a genuine tool in the service of the Arctic and its peoples, while also providing a framework for students and scientists from other parts of the world to learn more about the issues confronting the Arctic.

In Russia as in all the other circum-Polar States, the peoples living in Arctic areas only too rarely benefit from the Region's economic development. And they are confronted with constraints and migrations that jeopardise their very place on their own lands.

We cannot forget that non-indigenous populations are supplanting native peoples in most Arctic regions, which causes profound changes in all aspects - cultural, social, demographic and economic - of local societies thereby directly threatening their identity.

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Dear friends,

I would also like to evoke one last point, which is not unrelated to the situation of these peoples. In this year dedicated to biodiversity, I believe this is something that should be at the very centre of its preservation, in the Arctic as elsewhere.

This is indeed a matter that directly affects indigenous peoples, whose hunting and fishing grounds have been altered by upheavals in ecosystems and landscapes.

But it is also a matter that concerns us all and will concern the generations that will follow us even more.

Protecting biodiversity is not just a matter of preserving endangered plant and animal species. It also means protecting the Planet, its equilibrium and riches. It means being aware of what our lives owe to other species, recognising that Man on Earth cannot be the sole exclusive measure of all things.

This is why I hope we can discuss how to encourage the creation and development of protected marine areas that could enable the Arctic to conserve and regenerate stocks of certain endangered species by creating "sanctuaries". France, Italy and Monaco already did so successfully over a decade ago for the protection of marine mammals.

Today, in the face of the build-up of different activities that threaten the seas and their species, marine protected areas are one of the most effective solutions, as can be seen wherever they have been set up.

Through their global importance and the specific wealth of the species they harbour, Arctic reaches must be used to institute such areas without compromising the development of other pursuits.

The creation of such marine protected areas would be proof of a new awareness, in which we all work together, not only for the disappearing ice floes, not only for endangered Arctic peoples, but far more generally for Life itself.

Thank you.