Arctic Circle Forum, Edinburgh, Scotland

**Address by Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Poul Michelsen**

21 November 2017

First Minister Sturgeon, Former President and Chairman Grímsson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you in this beautiful city for Arctic Circle Forum. And, it is an honour for me - on behalf of the government and the people of the Faroe Islands - to speak to such a distinguished gathering of people.

For us it is particularly exciting that this event takes place in Scotland. Our sister nation to the south. The ties between the Faroes and Scotland date back a long way. We have many cultural and historical aspects in common. We have been trading partners since the Middle Ages. As fisheries nations we have collaborated for decades. Scotland receives the second highest number of Faroese university students in the world.

We share many of the same realities – particularly with the Scottish isles. I am convinced the lessons we can teach each other today and tomorrow are invaluable as we in the Arctic aim to adapt challenges to innovative opportunities.

Ladies and gentlemen.

The Faroe Islands are committed to being an active player in the Arctic and in the international community as a whole.

Like other nations and communities in the Arctic, the Faroese economy, society and very way of life is closely connected to our natural surroundings. For us as an island nation, a healthy and productive ocean means the difference between progress and downfall. Fisheries and aquaculture are vital to the economy and well-being of the Faroese people.

Our large maritime area, and the wider North Atlantic, is our resource base. It is our connection with the rest of the Arctic, and indeed with the rest of the world.

We have an ocean of opportunities that requires us to be wise. We take very seriously our responsibility to safeguard the ocean around us. We manage its resources wisely, and develop its enormous potential as a source of food, energy and transport in a sustainable way.

I firmly believe that the Arctic nations can and should lead the way in showing how our common challenges of distance, climate and demographics are not problems. They are drivers of innovation and sustainable development.

We are working to use our local perspectives and experiences in the Faroe Islands to make size and distance irrelevant. Not just for ourselves, but also for the rest of the global community.

One such experience, which is particularly pertinent now that we are in Scotland is the digital infrastructure in the Faroe Islands. Even the remotest parts of the Faroes are connected to the rest of the world with have high-speed internet powered by a sea-cable directly connecting Scotland and the Faroes.

In addition, I would like to highlight three areas where I see great strategic potential for us as a country in the Arctic region.

The **blue bio-economy** is a concept that the Faroe Islands embrace. It means making more out of our marine resources. We can - and we should - be thinking more in terms of quality than quantity. Adding value, developing new products and taking the lead in marine innovation.

**Maritime services** are in growing demand as shipping increases across the Arctic and North Atlantic. Infrastructure and technical expertise are key to ensuring both competitive business and effective international cooperation on maritime safety. We have a lot to offer in both respects in the Faroe Islands.

**A dynamic and democratic society** is a growing society. We must support new and creative ideas in our modern and digital age. We must ensure that all our citizens can prosper and be involved in shaping the future, with a strong sense of identity and inclusion. Education and research are key, and should be grounded in our own realities and potential as a society.

Ladies and gentlemen!

Our common challenges are unique opportunities if we are smart enough to approach them as such.

This approach will also be very much in focus next May in Tórshavn, when the Government of the Faroe Islands will be hosting the next Arctic Forum, in cooperation with the Arctic Circle.

I look forward to exchanging views with many of you here today. And, I look forward to welcoming you to the Faroe Islands next May, where we can continue the conversation and explore the potential for further international collaboration in more detail.

“Time and tide wait for no man”, a famous Scottish poet once wrote. It was true then and it is still true today. As decision-makers, we must face the realities of living in the Arctic. It is our responsibility to learn from one another. To share ideas. But more than that, we also have a duty to act, based on our shared ideas and shared responsibility.

Thank you - takk fyri!