

Opening words at the 6th NRF Open Assembly

Dr. Lassi Heininen, NRF Steering Committee

As the chairman of the Steering Committee it is my great pleasure and honour, on behalf of the Northern Research Forum, to open the 6th Open Assembly here in Hveragerdi, Iceland. I would also like warmly welcome you and encourage you to actively participate in the discussions of this event – for us the Steering Committee; the participants of our open assemblies are the most important actors of these gatherings.

The NRF Open Assemblies - the first one took place in Iceland in 2000 - have always been strongly characterised by two important approaches: '*intersectorality*', the interplay between politics and science, and '*interdisciplinarity*'. These two approaches, although not always recognized by computer programs, are exactly what our modern society needs, and in the globalized world there is a growing demand for them.

The fact that we have tried to implement these approaches in our gatherings, makes the NRF a rather unique forum. For the relevance of science, these methods appeal to the scientific community for an active approach, to make the interplay between science and politics more dynamic. This is the reason why these approaches have been, and are, the main objective, even the mission of the NRF. Please allow me to give you a personal example: as a political scientist I have learned so much more, because these two approaches have been taken seriously by the NRF. As a result of the various experiences of implementing *interdisciplinarity* I feel more confident running multidisciplinary workshops, study programs and summer schools, and even research projects. Indeed, "science is more than labs, it is the people, it is the environment".

Having said this, I must admit that now we, the NRF, are facing quite a big challenge, as we try to implement these complex approaches over just a few days during our event. About three years ago it was rather easy, almost natural, to decide such a global title as "Our Ice Dependent World": underlying such a concept was the understanding that ice as a common heritage of humankind is in danger, and that the global perspective was not new, since the NRF started dealing with global issues five years ago during the discussions of the 4th Open Assembly.

However, it was not clear at that time how multi-functional and complex the theme would be – it has been like opening Pandora box, which you cannot, and in our case do not want to close -, because of its timeliness and relevancy. Literally we face the impacts of dwindling ice, and the complex interface of nature and society all over the world. As we say: together with the rapid, and partly man-made, climate change, ice as natural phenomenon is becoming a concept of global politics, and "a World Without Ice" would not only look different, but would bring environmental, economic, cultural and political consequences which have more problems and challenges than possibilities.

Although the NRF has shifted towards a more global perspectives, not until this NRF have we added such a new and important dimension - that of the Third Pole Environment (TPE) group. We are very pleased to have all the expertise from the Himalayan regions' countries and welcome the representatives of the TPE workshop, which took place a few days ago in Reykjavik, Iceland. I have had the pleasure and enjoyed the benefits of this dimension, since Tuesday when I learnt from Valerie Masson-Delmotte's presentation that there is such thing as "a tri-polar perspective on climate change" (i.e. links between "northern pull", "southern push" and monsoon) in order to have a process-based understanding of the climatic drivers of precipitation isotopic composition - hopefully I have understood it correctly.

I believe that all of us can appreciate the value added when bringing scientists from the countries of the Himalayan region together to discuss and explore common issues. This does not only broaden the perspective of the NRF Open Assembly but strengthens substantially the '*interdisciplinarity*' of the event. Dr. Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, President of Iceland, and also the chairman of the NRF Honorary Board, has played an important role in the 6th NRF.

Dear participants,

Let me summarize the theme and aim of this gathering as follows: "From the bi-polarity of the Cold War (Arctic), through multi-polar international politics, to a global discourse of the three poles". We are facing, environmentally, geopolitically, and from a human being's point of view a very fundamental and geographically broad issue that is very relevant and sensitive. Furthermore, from the point of view of science, knowledge and understanding, it is an important interdisciplinary issue, and from a governance standpoint it is an intersectoral issue. Finally, it is not only latitude, which matters, but also altitude - I would like to add that attitude matters as well.

Indeed, we live in an 'Age of Uncertainty' due to rapid climate change and constant warfare against terrorism, or 'other' meaning anything unknown or strange actions that can be interpreted as threatening. If this were not already enough, we are also faced with fiscal as well as political crises (this includes a big shift of money from people and the public to private sector and big companies), which are threatened by the danger of a collapse in a moral sense. These are all good reasons to say, that there is a need for real political leadership.

In this context, the Arctic region – and its role in world politics has been greatly strengthened in the last 20 years – as an area with high geostrategic importance and rich resources as well as a rich diversity of life. It also acts as a scientific 'workshop' for research on the environment and climate change, and even more; it provides a good example of advanced human capital - meaning innovations in governance, and political and legal agreements. Recently, it has become known as a region of stability and peace – though not, yet, "devoted to peace and science" as Antarctica is - which is not overtly afflicted by regional or global war or armed conflicts -, this is an achievement in our current world with its many wars and armed conflicts.

Hopefully, we, the organizers of this event have planned and designed an interesting program for you, which is being held in such nice premises and pleasant surroundings – and it is also being web-casting. We have invited inspiring panellists from several countries and four continents, particularly

from the Arctic and the Himalayan regions. Based on our call for participants we received about 60 excellent applications by young researchers, and selected 14 brilliant ones to participate as NRF young researchers in this event. You all represent many professions, fields and disciplines - from glaciology to international law and humanities - and thus have many and valuable points of view. I am very proud to say that this is a unique gathering with a stimulating program and an excellent group of experts.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the NRF Secretariat, the Local Host Committee, and President Grimsson and the President's Office for making all this possible. Especially since as many of you most probably know, the road that led us all here today has not been an easy one, but rather rough and rocky due to the fact that we had to inadvertently move the Open Assembly from Norway to Iceland this spring, only about half a year ago, which caused many challenges as you can well imagine. As a result, we did not have much time for fund-raising and logistical preparations. Fortunately the theme, sub-themes and thematic program were ready. Taking all this into consideration, and the fact that Iceland is still recovering from its deep economic recession, it is almost a miracle - through hard work, much of it by the Secretariat, we managed to succeed in holding the 6th NRF. In Finland we have a saying that if needed, a man goes through a grey rock - now I know that Icelanders can do the same.

Much has already been done, and there is still much to do - a stage has been built, there are the players, and there is a glimmer of an idea of what might be played out here, but the actors have yet to perform.

A dialogue – one of the main aims of the NRF is 'dialogue-building' -, a real, equal and democratic dialogue is not a battlefield, in which each participant tries to make his/her own horizon win the contest of competing perspectives. It is an action, where participants embrace the open-ended nature of the dialogue, are committed, engaged in each others' arguments and listen carefully to what others are saying, and focus on an issue domain in order to be able to generate as Kornprobst has put it. If most of these features are fulfilled, as I believe, a dialogue, such as our open discussion, is no utopian goal, or waste of time: A real dialogue is much needed in our modern societies, since 'the old ways of thinking and acting just will not do'.

Furthermore, there is a necessity, and there is growing willingness 'to seek out fresh thinking and bold new ideas'. Particularly, if we try to solve the real challenges we are facing; so often it's better first to think and talk, before acting, in order to avoid some bad mistakes. Of course, a dialogue per se is not yet enough, but will act as a springboard for other activities: A dialogue should be followed by sharp analyses and unorthodox syntheses, new fresh ideas and proposals, and new kinds of preconditions, requirements and expectations for a new global leadership.

The stage is set – another aim of the NRF is 'stage-building'. The actors are invited, present and acknowledged as be able and capable, they have their scripts and the knowledge to perform. Finally, we know that the play deals with the whole globe. Let's start the performance, an open discussion and dialogue based on professional, expert presentations.

Dear participants, you are the actors. Please take the challenge and be active – the stage is yours!