**Former President Grímsson, Prime Minister Jakobsdóttir, Minister Kono – excellencies and friends.**

It is a pleasure to join you in Reykjavík for this year’s Arctic Circle Assembly. 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 great gathering takes place in Iceland. Our sister nation to the northwest. The ties between the Faroes and Iceland date back a long way.

We share many of the same realities – untamed and harsh natural conditions, which have taught us to be practical, adaptable and resilient.

I am convinced the lessons we can teach each other over the next few days are invaluable as we in the Arctic aim to turn challenges into 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.

This Assembly is an excellent opportunity every year for the Faroe Islands to make important new global contacts, as well as maintaining our close ties with our nearest neighbors in the region.

And of course we were very pleased to host the Arctic Circle Forum in Tórshavn in May this year, which in many ways was an eye opener for us. We were pleasantly surprised by the large number of participants as well as the many professionals and institutions who wanted to speak and organize sessions. The press coverage which followed gave us a clear impression of the extensive interest in our geographical area.

Like other nations and communities in the Arctic, the Faroese economy, society and the 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.

Our society and our economy is thriving and growing. The Faroes export high quality seafood to all six continents. We provide welfare services to our growing population, meeting the expectations of modern globalized citizens. Our people have the same high standards of communication services that you find in the advanced cities of the world.

The population is growing, and we recently reached the record high of fifty-one thousand. The population continues to grow, both owing to a healthy birth rate, and because the number of people who want to move to our islands is higher than those who leave for other places.

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 using 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.

To give you some concrete examples, a special side event on Sunday will highlight the approaches we are taking in the Faroe Islands to finding digital solutions and developing green energy in our island nation – these are approaches which we believe also have much wider international interest and application.

Together with our West Nordic colleagues from Iceland and Greenland, we will also be discussing our geopolitical position in the Arctic and globally at a session here tomorrow organised by the West Nordic Council.

These and other aspects of the programme here in Reykjavik this weekend will be underlining how local and regional approaches can and should be guiding the global agenda for sustainable development.

Once again, I would like to thank the Arctic Circle Assembly and its partners for providing an international platform that truly allows us to showcase the many different faces and voices of the Arctic from all sectors of society - not just **who** we are and **where** we are, but also why and how we are, as participants and partners in the Arctic and globally.