**Climate Change and Future Scenarios**

**in the Arctic Region**

**ROUND TABLE**

*(Venice, 11-12th December 2014)*

**Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson**

Distinguish guests, ladies and gentleman,

I want to thank the Government of Italy for inviting me to speak at this event.  
It offers an opportunity to look at the future of the Arctic region from abroad perspective.

Many of the issues covered there touch upon the core elements in Iceland’s Arctic policy and have a strong relevance for our regional and international cooperation.

There are three points I believe are central to our discussion:

Firstly, the rules of the game: it is sometimes implied that the Arctic will turn into a cold version of the Wild West.

The reality is different: the High North is characterized by low tension and the legal environment in the Arctic rests on a solid foundation. Legal and institutional arrangements are formerly emplaced, defining responsibilities and rights of states.

Most importantly, the Arctic States are committed to respecting the United Nations Convention of the law of the sea or guiding light in solving legal matters and possible disputes and, at the same time, it is important to continue to build on the existing legal framework and developing tools to be better prepared to address emergency challenges in the Arctic.

The two legal arrangements on Search and Rescue and Marine Oil Pollution, signed by the Arctic States, are good examples of concrete steps. International agreements and efforts that contribute to climate change mitigation are crucial for the future of the Arctic.  
The new climate change agreement, to be signed in Paris next year, will hopefully be a game changer in this respect on sustainable path.

Iceland has affirmed its commitment to sustainable development in the Arctic Region, including economic and social development. The human dimension is very important. You must ensure that those living in the region can influence decision making that may affect the future well-being .

An important project that Iceland is leading, the Arctic Human Development Report, published this month, will give us valuable inside look into the Arctic demographics, societies and culture, but also the border issue of climate change and development. We are witnessing increasing economic activity, shipping, tourism and resource development in the Arctic, calling for expanding roles and responsibilities, such as environmental security and protection. Capillary in our policy on the oceans is to ensure sustainable use of living marine resources and to strongly advocate the same sustainability principles in all international fora.

It is also imperative that governments, industries and other relevant actors look to our future and continue to develop renewable energy resources. Here, Iceland is in a particularly good position to lead by example as almost 100% of our electricity today comes from renewables, mainly hydro and geothermal.

This power sources will not resolve all of our problems, but they are becoming increasingly technologically accessible and reliable and could be utilized by millions of people worldwide for electricity, including in the Arctic.

Ladies and gentlemen, secondly I want to mention the importance of international cooperation.

Iceland’s Arctic policy is built on the foundation that the winning key element in achieving a sustainable Arctic future is to internationalize cooperation.

During the last 20 years the great statement of the Arctic States has been to build trust and cooperation. This is based on the fact that we share the same environment and we have a common responsibility for the protection and sustainable use of the Arctic. This is reflected in the establishment of the Arctic Council in 1996, the most important international forum on Arctic issues. Since then, the Arctic Councils are developed from a foreign policy shaping into policy making.

An important step was taken in Kiruna in 2013, when Italy and other interested non-Arctic States became Observers to the Arctic Council. Iceland supported that process, seeing it was an opportunity for the Arctic Council to adapt to a changing reality with a strong and constructive engagement.

It is our task to define more clearly how we can build on this engagement in the most constructive and beneficial way for the Arctic states, the Permanent Participants, the Arctic Council, as well for the Observers.

That brings me to my third and last point: the importance of science and knowledge.

Policy should be based on the best helpful information, in order to better understand the planet changes, in able to meet the many challenges and opportunities in the Arctic in the most wise, effective and responsible way. International science cooperation is also an effective tool for understanding and trust. Therefore, I am pleased to be able to contribute to this event.

It is a great fact that an Observer State like Italy with decades of experience in conducting and founding scientific activities in Arctic, can actively contribute to Arctic research and science.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude by thanking the Venice International University for hosting and organizing this event.

I sent you my best wishes and that you will have an enjoy and fruitful dialogue.

Thank you.