

**Speech by H. E. Mr. Taro Kono, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan
at the Arctic Circle 2018
Opening Session
19 October 2018, Reykjavik, Iceland**

Good morning.

His Excellency Mr. Grímsson, Chairman of the Arctic Circle,
Her Excellency Ms. Jakobsdóttir, Prime Minister of Iceland,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Chairman Grímsson for giving me the opportunity to speak here today. It is my great honor to visit Iceland, especially when you celebrate one hundred years as a sovereign state, and to speak at this important forum for the first time as the Foreign Minister of Japan.

In May of last year, I visited the Ilulissat Icefjord in Greenland. There, I saw a number of icebergs from melting glaciers floating in the icefjord, and witnessed firsthand the result of rising temperature and how it was making the climate unstable. But, honestly speaking, I was freezing to death on a ship. I have never thought about global warming. But the captain of the ship told me all the story that he recognized from twenty years of his life on ship.

Global warming and its effects are accelerating, especially in the Arctic. It has created new “opportunities” for natural resource development and the use of the Northern Sea Route. These effects, however, pose serious “challenges”, such as negative impacts on the ecosystem and the life of indigenous peoples in the Arctic.

The challenges in the Arctic are common concerns shared by the international community, regardless of whether or not they are Arctic states. We need to tackle these challenges together. I believe that minimizing the negative effects and maximizing the “opportunities” of the Arctic can benefit us all. For achieving this goal, we should understand how the Arctic environment has been changing and what impacts these changes have on human communities and economies. Therefore, it is particularly important to reveal the mechanisms of the Arctic environmental change which are yet unclear.

I have come all the way to Reykjavik with one message: Japan is determined to cooperate with all stakeholders to realize our common view on an “Ideal Arctic”.

So, what is an “Ideal Arctic” for all of us?

I think it has three elements;

First, the mechanism of environmental changes in the Arctic must be clarified and well understood, and the necessary responses to these changes must be shared with the international community. We need to further advance scientific research in this regard.

Second, sustainable economic activities are to be pursued in the Arctic, while respecting the ecosystem and the life of indigenous peoples.

Third, “the rule of law” must be ensured and international cooperation must be promoted in a peaceful and orderly manner.

We put these points in “Japan’s Arctic Policy”, which is our first-ever comprehensive, strategic Arctic policy adopted in 2015.

Now let me explain Japan’s strategy to achieve an “Ideal Arctic”.

First, on scientific research. Understanding the climate change mechanisms in the Arctic based on solid scientific data allows us to make appropriate responses and to pursue sustainable development in the area. Japan has been contributing to research and scientific observations in the Arctic since the 1950s, and promoting scientific cooperation in the Arctic with the relevant countries. By making use of this scientific research, Japan continues to play a role in this area.

One good example of our efforts is its Arctic research project called ArCS, or “Arctic Challenge for Sustainability”, which was initiated in 2015 as our national flagship project. The participating Japanese institutes have promoted research in such areas as climate, weather, ocean environments, biodiversity and community in the Arctic. ArCS contributes to clarifying the

climate changes and environmental effects in the Arctic and to improving projections, environmental assessment and the life of community in the Arctic.

Another example is the Arctic Data archive System, which Japan has been operating since 2012. This system allows all of us to get an access to multiple observational and model simulation datasets, which are collected and analyzed by Japanese scientists. The data is open to all on the website and contributes to enhancing scientific research in the Arctic. We hope that other countries will also become open for further international cooperation in Arctic scientific research.

Collecting maritime data in the Arctic Ocean is essential to understanding the Arctic's environmental change mechanisms. With this in mind, the Government of Japan is considering building a new icebreaker for the Arctic research as a new international Arctic research platform.

Besides the control of greenhouse gas emissions, Japan is also working to mitigate black carbon emissions to curb the ongoing warming in the Arctic. Monitoring system developed by Japan has been used for scientific cooperation on black carbon in cooperation with Russia and Canada. Furthermore, a joint data-comparing project on black carbon with Finland will be launched in the near future. Through these efforts, I believe we can achieve the sustainable development goals in the Arctic.

The Second Arctic Science Ministerial to be held next week will be a good opportunity to discuss international scientific cooperation. It highlights the importance of promoting Arctic related data sharing, and we fully support the idea. I am pleased to share with you that Japan is seeking to host the Arctic Science Ministerial in the near future.

Second, on the pursuit of sustainable economic use. The issue has two aspects, namely, the “opportunities” and “challenges”.

The “opportunities” are expanding. Geographically, Hokkaido, our northernmost island, is a gateway from Asia to the Northern Sea Route. We see potential opportunities for this route and I will encourage more Japanese companies to pay attention to Arctic businesses.

We are promoting comprehensive energy development cooperation with

Russia in its Arctic regions, while fully taking account of the environment. We welcome the fact that Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation (JOGMEC) and NOVATEK signed a Memorandum of Understanding last month. They intend to explore opportunities for cooperation on NOVATEK's projects in the Yamal and Gydan Peninsulas in Russia, including the Arctic LNG 2 project.

We also need to deal with the “challenges” the international community faces in the Arctic. Increased shipping in the Arctic Ocean could raise the risk of accidents that may lead to Arctic pollution. In particular, oil pollution incidents could cause tremendous environmental damage across a vast area. Data on the status of the sea ice is essential for safe and effective navigation in the Arctic. The National Institute of Polar Research of Japan has been developing the Vessel Navigation Unit support System, so-called VENUS. The system provides an overview of destination-specific information on sea ice and weather conditions in quasi-real time manner, covering a thousand kilometers from any ship that may access to this VENUS system. I hope that VENUS will be put to practical use as soon as possible.

Third, on the rule of law in the Arctic.

How should we act when we see expanding “opportunities” in the Arctic, such as the development of natural resources? No one wants the Arctic to be a place where interests collide and conflicts are solved by power. I would like to stress that free and open maritime order based on the rule of law is indispensable. The Arctic Ocean is no exception.

The international community needs to respect a rule-based maritime order built on international law in the Arctic as well. The importance of “a rule-based maritime order” was affirmed by Japan, China and the Republic of Korea at the Second Trilateral High-Level Dialogue on the Arctic in 2017. Japan hopes that all states become party to the UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea).

Japan will actively participate in the formulation process of new international rules for the Arctic. For instance, we have discussed with other stakeholders how to effectively address the issue of unregulated high seas fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean, and as a result of this discussion a new international legal instrument was created and we already signed it this month.

Cooperation among law enforcement authorities can also play an important role in maintaining a rule-based maritime order. We appreciate the cooperation through the Arctic Coast Guard Forum by the Arctic States. Japan will seek to reinforce the cooperation between the Japan Coast Guard and its counterparts in the Arctic States.

In closing, I truly appreciate the ongoing cooperation among the Arctic States in areas such as maritime search and rescue, marine oil pollution response and scientific research, including through the Arctic Council. In order to realize an “Ideal Arctic”, Japan will further promote cooperation with the Arctic States and other stakeholders.

I hope that today’s discussions will provide fruitful inputs for our future Arctic.

Thank you very much.