Mr. President of the Republic

Madame President of the Saami Parliament of Finland

Dear Arctic Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to thank the organizers for this opportunity to participate in the Second Arctic Biodiversity Congress, which is one of the most important events during the Finnish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

We have already passed the half-way post of the two-year Arctic Council Chairmanship. The constructive attitude of all Arctic states and organizations representing Arctic indigenous peoples has made it possible to advance common goals and to shape the Arctic agenda.

This week will be decisive for advancing the environmental and climate goals that Finland has set for the Chairmanship period. The biodiversity Congress will be followed by an Arctic Environment Ministers meeting, which will hopefully set some badly needed targets for Arctic cooperation in climate and environmental issues.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The experts of Arctic biodiversity know better than anybody what risks climate change will cause to life in our region. It may be expected that more animals and plants are moving to the North because temperatures are becoming more moderate. Thus we may experience even sporadic increases in biodiversity in the Northern latitudes.

However, species that have adapted to Northern conditions are likely to suffer. There is a great risk of disturbances of Arctic habitats and the danger of a general degradation of animal and plant life in our region.

The Darwinist idea of the survival of the fittest will be tested in a new situation, when life forms will not have the necessary time for evolution or even adaptation. Species that are the most resistant to changes would be the winners. With some exaggeration, we could ask whether we will be facing an invasion of cockroaches, rats and jellyfish?

The well-known writer Yuval Noah Harari claims that the transition to agriculture as the main source of livelihood was the beginning of the problems that humans are now facing. Be that as it may, favoring cultivated plants and breeding domestic animals in great numbers has definitely reduced biodiversity in large areas.

It is time to assess the impact of humans on climate, environment and biodiversity and take a more reasonable course of action, which will not push us toward uncertain destinies. There is no Plan B, and it is safer to believe in Santa
Claus than in our ability to fix climate problems afterwards with technological means.

Mitigating and reversing climate change takes concrete, sustained actions. Implementing the Paris climate agreement is a necessary first step in slowing down and mitigating climate change. Complementary measures reducing the emissions of short-lived climate pollutants such as black carbon should be taken urgently.

On biodiversity, fulfilling the Aichi targets on protected areas is crucial. In the Arctic land areas, this work has progressed well, but in establishing Arctic marine protected areas we are lagging behind, with less than a half of the target fulfilled.

Protecting Arctic nature does not mean making our region a museum. On the contrary, it is an integral part of ensuring the sustainable use of resources. Environmental degradation is a great risk also to economic and social development. Well-considered regulation of activities, negotiated between interested parties, including business organizations, will be a much better way to move forward.

The precautionary principle has been rarely applied in guiding human activity. However, last week an important, legally binding agreement prohibiting commercial fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean was signed between the Arctic States, the most relevant non-Arctic States and the EU.

The agreement will allow us to develop a better understanding of the changing ecosystem and the movement of species, and give us time to put the appropriate
conservation and management measures in place. This is an example that should be followed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to end by thanking the CAFF Working Group and our colleagues in the Finnish Ministry of the Environment for planning the Biodiversity Congress and for the invaluable work that they are doing in the Arctic Council.

I would also like to thank the City of Rovaniemi for their support for this Congress and to other Arctic Council events during the past more than twenty years.