

*“The Arctic, a symbol of our mistakes or of our environmental awareness? »*  
*Address of H.S.H. the Prince*  
*Arctic Frontiers Conference – Tromsø, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2015*

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Every time humanity sets eyes on the deserts of ice and snow, it questions its own destiny.

Whether we see there supernatural expanses or the last vestiges of an immaculate nature, whether we fear their power or are trying to preserve their fragility, whether we dream of crossing them or are afraid of getting lost, our way of looking at the Arctic is always an indicator of our own situation, of our own conscience.

My great-great grandfather, Prince Albert I, who conducted several Polar expeditions over a century ago, on his return from Spitzbergen wrote in his memoirs: “never had I experienced such an emotional sea voyage, never had I probed so deeply into human nature”...

Still today, the Arctic prompts us to reflect on ourselves, on the dangers and contradictions of our natural environment and our civilisation. Because we see there a symbol of what humanity is inflicting upon its environment, all around the globe.

The facts are now known. The latest "Arctic report card" published a few weeks ago, reminds us how the region has been subjected more than any other to global warming - primarily of anthropogenic origin. We can see the particularly worrying melting of the sea ice, record high water temperatures, in particular in the Chukchi Sea where the average temperature is rising over half a degree every decade, and a continuous decline in the snow cover.

These changes weaken the entire area, disrupting the ecosystems, speeding up global warming and above all provoking ever-increasing greed among humans, eager to exploit new and more easily accessible resources, in particular energy resources.

Things have therefore come full circle, with global warming which, due to the ice melt and the decreased reflection of the sun's rays, increases on its own, and which as a consequence leads to the development of new activities which can but further weaken the region...

This circle of decline in which the Arctic is engaged, due to our joint responsibility, is a global issue. That is why I am delighted to see the high level of attendance today at this conference, with representatives from various regions of the world.

It is a global issue because the Arctic plays a key role in the Earth's balances, in particular that of the climate. But also because this vulnerable region is simply undergoing in advance the damage that will affect all other regions tomorrow if nothing is done to reverse the spiral in which we are caught.

In this respect, the Arctic is a symbol of the threats hanging over us. These threats are of course global warming, the deterioration of ecosystems and the risks of pollution. All down to human fault, who inflict this damage on our Planet...

Instead of dwelling on scientific and technical elements, I would like to take the time to speak about what for me are the true dangers looming over the Arctic. I can sum them up into two seemingly contradictory evils: the feeling of human omnipotence and the temptation to give up.

First of all, the feeling of omnipotence explains the situation in which we find ourselves today. It is the temptation of humans to believe that they alone are the masters and owners of nature. It is the predation of everything the Planet offers us, the unbridled exploitation of non renewable resources, the irreversible degradation of landscapes and ecosystems.

Today it is the desire to open up new shipping routes in the Arctic paying no heed to the consequences for the areas crossed. It is the hope of venturing there in order to find new hydrocarbon sources with no real concern for either the impact of such exploitation or the tragedy that an oil spill would create in these fragile seas and to the people that live on their shores.

It is also the conviction that the fate of the Arctic concerns only the bordering states, even though we are fully aware that it concerns the entire Planet. This is a regrettably short-sighted view which pushes us all into disregarding what is far from us: our fellow human beings who live a little further away, those who will come in a few decades or a few centuries, and all the complex mechanisms that make our direct responsibility, even if this is not spontaneously vital in our eyes...

The greatest threat is the ambition to subjugate the Arctic to our immediate needs with no concern for the consequences of our acts.

Because in addition to this excess, this "hubris" as the Greeks said, which has always been a risk for humanity, there is now a new phenomenon which paradoxically nurtures it: it is the complexity of the world, the feeling of being confronted with phenomena that are too vast to be controlled, too heavy to be impeded.

Next to our technological power, it is the feeling of our political impotence.

It is our understanding that we run the risk of no longer being able to curb these climate changes. It is our awareness of the slow and indirect mechanisms that escape our reflexes punctuated by urgency and immediacy. It is the conviction that our isolated actions will not be sufficient to change things. And above all it is the spectacle of these international summits which fail to bring about clear prospects for change.

This sense of powerlessness is widespread and is not unwarranted. For years now, we have had summit after summit dubbed as "the last chance" to protect biodiversity, mitigate climate change and combat desertification. And, for years, the world has seen these negotiations fail - while leading to some progress, their outcome falls short of both the expectations we place in them and the objective issues they must or should reach.

Therefore the illusion of omnipotence and the sense of powerlessness mingle, creating the crisis in which we are today, a crisis created by the technological headlong rush and political immobility. A crisis whose effects we can see in the Arctic but which in reality threatens the entire Planet, subjected to the same tensions and the same contradictions...

I believe that this situation is unprecedented, but is not however irremediable. Because at a time when we see the excesses of an often irresponsible civilisation, we also see a new awareness arising all around the world. And we should also acknowledge that despite the setbacks and disappointments, progress is underway which proves that powerlessness is not inevitable.

Solutions exist: it is up to us to implement them. We can do this if we act in accordance with three principles that I believe are essential: to work with international organisations, with scientists and with civil society.

First of all with international organisations.

Faced with issues, which as I pointed out, concern the entire Planet, it would be unrealistic to want to move forward alone. This does not mean that the bordering countries do not have a specific responsibility to play in the Arctic but it does mean that they cannot evade the duty of collective responsibility.

Because the future of the Arctic does not just require local measures, which moreover involve states beyond the Arctic Circle, since many countries have commercial activities relating to

this region. It also requires intensified efforts to combat climate change, which is by nature a global issue.

We must therefore progress with a dual focus: local: the protection of the Arctic, and global: the fight against climate change.

As far as the specific situation of the region is concerned, I believe it is necessary to equip ourselves with new, better adapted tools. I am thinking in particular of specific international rules to protect the Arctic, which could take inspiration, even if the context is very different, from those that for decades have protected the Antarctic.

Based on the concept of humanity's collective responsibility, striving above all to promote peace, ratified by countries far beyond those in the immediate vicinity, no way calling into question the essential notion of sovereignty, but affirming the higher interest of science, the Antarctic Treaty should inspire us for the drafting, that I earnestly hope to see, of an international text specific to the Arctic, especially for the areas situated beyond national jurisdictions, as is established by the convention on the Law of the Sea.

The Montego Bay Convention allows us to outline a sustainable management plan for the sea and high seas, under which the Arctic falls in many respects. It provides us an appropriate framework for genuine collective progress, provided that we seize the opportunity. That is why Monaco is firmly committed to improving this text, through the establishment of a protocol aimed at preserving offshore biodiversity beyond areas under national jurisdiction, and that is why I personally support the work currently being conducted regarding this issue by the United Nations.

Likewise, priority should be given to the UN framework to combat climate change. As the next conference in Paris draws closer, we should all agree to make every effort necessary in order that bold and binding decisions at last be made - the only way of mitigating such tremendous global warming.

I would like to point out that if we do nothing, our entire Planet will be made vulnerable, with increased temperatures that will rise widely beyond 2°C by the end of this century. These increased temperatures would be dramatic from every point of view, with the disruption of fragile ecosystems, such as the Arctic, but also other particularly serious indirect consequences, including ocean acidification for which I can proudly say Monaco plays a key warning role, and even more the impact on the populations, in particular the most vulnerable, and the escalation of climate refugees...

That is why we all need to make a commitment to combating global warming, by reducing our consumption of fossil fuels, as the Principality of Monaco has done, by promoting clean energies and by improving energy efficiency through technological innovation. This is lengthy and cumbersome work, but the only way that will enable us to break with the spiral of environmental destruction, and thus ensure a serene and sustainable future for the Arctic...

The second principle which I believe we need to take on board is to work closely with scientists.

In the face of climate change, studies do exist and must be continued, in particular those conducted by the IPCC. Because this work provides valuable certainties, alone capable of allowing us to move forward collectively without endangering future generations. In many ways, the Arctic is a neglected reality. A reality that we can only protect effectively if we gain a better understanding of it..

Finally, and this is the third principle I want to stress upon here, we need to work in cooperation with civil society.

With the local populations, who very often are ignored in the decision-making progress and yet are the first concerned. How, for example, can we imagine implementing the necessary energy transition if we do not closely involve the populations? And how can we imagine ensuring the future of the Arctic if the indigenous peoples are excluded? I, who through my Foundation, actively support the action implemented by the University of the Arctic for example, know that the future of the region requires the involvement of its populations who I am delighted to see represented here.

We also need to work with NGOs who provide valuable energy and have vital implementation methods. States today can no longer act alone. That is why my Foundation, active particularly with regard to Arctic issues, currently supports around ten projects in this field.

We also need to work with companies, which need to understand their global and local responsibilities. Their input could prove to be essential, in particular when defining preservation areas, as shown by the late Christophe de Margerie, CEO of the Total Group, who affirmed a few years ago his opposition to any offshore drilling projects by his group in the Arctic.

And finally we need to work with international public opinion. People need to take a stand for the Arctic as they have taken a stand against climate change. Today they provide a

springboard for responsible and efficient collective action. They are concerned about the future of their children. They are calling for a change of model. We need to respond to them, inform them and involve them, like this forum, widely publicised, is helping to do.

The Paris conference on the climate, which will be held in less than a year, represents in this respect a key event, in which we must all get actively involved, in order to make this global meeting the opportunity for genuine progress, a response to both the illusions of destructive omnipotence and the renunciation of powerlessness...

This is of course an extensive task which concerns the Arctic and, over and above that, the future of the entire Planet. That is why I am delighted to see how many of us there are making efforts on these issues, and that is why I hope above all that each of us will see beyond his/her own interests, comfort, habits and usual horizons to address this challenge.

This is how the Arctic, today a symbol of our illusions and our renunciation, may tomorrow become the symbol of our ability to overcome them and ensure the future of this Planet more effectively and sustainability.

As the great philosopher Hannah Arendt wrote, "Progress and disaster are two sides of the same coin"... the choice is in our hands.

Thank you.