

XXVIII ANTARCTIC TREATY CONSULTATIVE MEETING

Address at the opening of the Meeting

by

Ambassador Hans Corell

Chairman of the Meeting

**Stockholm
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Distinguished delegates,

It is a great honour for me to accept your electing me Chairman of the 28th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting.

On a personal note, may I add that I am very pleased to be involved with Antarctica again. During my tenure in the United Nations over the past ten years, I was deeply involved with the Law of the Sea, including with the establishment of the three institutions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, but not with Antarctica since it is not within the mandate of the UN Office of Legal Affairs.

I can assure you that my colleagues and I will do our utmost to make this Meeting a fruitful and a good one – a Meeting that will take matters forward in the very special spirit that is the hallmark of our cooperation relating to the Antarctic.

This Meeting brings with it a new element: an operational Secretariat under Executive Secretary Jan Huber. It was established last year, but it is the first time the Secretariat is operational at one of our Meetings. I look forward with great expectations to a gratifying and enjoyable cooperation with Jan Huber and his colleagues. And I know that Folke Löfgren, Secretary General of the Host Country Secretariat, and his team have already developed a very good cooperation with them.

One thing is clear: the mere mentioning of Antarctica brings about an immediate reaction among those who listen. And it is almost always positive. It is true that the Antarctic represents extreme cold and eternal ice – and yet! Antarctica is something great and – hopefully – eternal. It also reminds us of the ongoing and unrelenting struggle of human beings to gain knowledge and to widen their horizons.

There were many heroes. The Antarctic has been and still is the scene of many adventures and bold enterprises. The stories and legends are many. And many are those have passed them on. Even more numerous are those who have been fascinated by this continent, the last one to be discovered. It was known to humankind only at the beginning of the 19th century.

As is well known, Admiral Teodor von Bellingshausen is claimed to be the explorer who first sighted the ice shelf of the Antarctic continent – a continent without human life but so full of other things. Still ice time. Extreme climatic conditions. Everything so extraordinary and thrilling.

This enormous continent was examined and mapped step-by-step. Initially, focus was on exploration and whaling and sealing and the like. This is understandable. However, at an early stage, also research and the efforts to gain knowledge and insight came to the forefront, and soon there was an increasing presence of scientists among those who undertook travels to the Antarctic.

As a matter of fact, the first among them, Captain James Cook, had a number of scientists on board when, in 1774, he reached the icebergs and was forced to turn. On board this ship there was also a Swedish scientist, Anders Sparrman, a disciple of Linnaeus.

When hearing “Antarctica”, most people see before them the enormous width of snow, the glaciers and the high mountains that here and there rise over the kilometre thick inland-ice. They see the wealth of creatures: penguins, seals, whales and the extraordinary conditions of life that has developed in this the coldest, driest and probably highest continent.

Sweden’s first contribution to Antarctic research is of an early date. Otto Nordenskjöld’s expedition in 1901-03 nearly perished but was miraculously saved by an Argentinean relief expedition on board the corvette *The Uruguay*.

In this endeavour more than hundred years ago tremendous courage and determination was demonstrated. It should be regarded as an early expression of the Antarctic Spirit. It was a demonstration of a spirit of cooperation and preparedness to extend assistance of a kind that grows stronger and natural in situations where the outdoor impediments and threats are as extreme as they are in Antarctica.

Over the years, this cooperation has developed and refined. The Antarctic Treaty is a continuation of this spirit, and it is the same spirit that has characterized earlier Meetings and which will characterize also the present one.

The Antarctic Treaty has existed for about half a century. It is an outflow of what I just mentioned: a determination to create something new and extraordinary out of this continent of the extreme.

It was the advances in connection with the International Geophysical Year 1957-58 that made it possible to reach an agreement on the Antarctic Treaty. Military and strategic interests were put aside. At a time when the world was plagued by Cuban and Berlin crises and similar hardships, the conditions developed for a particularly well functioning model for international cooperation. This we know, because the Antarctic Treaty regime has handled many crises and developed its own dynamic, its own way of producing solutions.

Unfortunately, the success of the cooperation of the Antarctic Treaty is little known. In a sense it is a model and it has functioned well in spite of tensions. Conflicts have been resolved and managed. The Treaty deserves much more attention than it gets, and the spirit for which it stands should be demonstrated also in other fields.

The Convention on the Protection of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) was the first international agreement in which principles like those on ecological balance and the precautionary principle were set out. It was a matter of attaining a sustainable use of the resources of the sea. These principles are now the cornerstones of all ensuing conventions on fisheries administration.

In 1991, the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty was elaborated, which in the same way provides an elaborate regime with respect the

conditions for all activities in Antarctica. Mineral resources must not be exploited. All activities must be examined and their environmental consequences must be examined. Rules exist on what is permissible: on permission to visit Antarctica, on how to manage garbage and residual products, etc.

Today, environmental issues are certainly very much in the focus of the media and the general public. The climate change! What does it mean? What are the consequences of the quick melting of the ices? Is this just a natural change, such as researchers have been able to establish and which have occurred many times in the past, or is it something new, something special, disquieting, threatening?

Environmental protection has always been a central theme of the cooperation between the parties to the Antarctic Treaty. As with previous Meetings, the workload for the Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP) is substantial. There are over 80 working papers and information papers submitted for consideration. Many important issues are on the Committee's agenda, among them consideration of the environmental impacts associated with the construction and operation of two new research stations and further development of a system for reporting on the state of the Antarctic environment.

Additionally, the CEP has undertaken to review its work to date, with the intent of considering its method of operation and its strategic directions and future work. This issue is likely to prompt spirited discussion among CEP Members, who take seriously their responsibilities for protecting the Antarctic environment.

On Wednesday this week, the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) will arrange a presentation at 11 am, which will be held in presence of His Majesty the King of Sweden.

So, the environmental issues are central and will be given great attention in various ways in the days ahead.

In the Environmental Protocol the parties have agreed to regulate questions of responsibility and liability for activities in the Antarctic Treaty Area. This is a particularly complex chapter. However, it would seem that the parties are now very close to a common view and a decision. As the host country, Sweden has accorded these questions highest priority. Let us hope that the Meeting will succeed and that we will be able to announce that the parties have been able to agree upon a special protocol to regulate these issues.

There are other areas with high priority. One is tourism in Antarctica. This tourism is steadily growing after a decline in the wake of 11 September 2001. There are many issues here for the parties to discuss and problems to solve.

The question of bio-prospecting has been raised at previous Antarctic Treaty Meetings. The CEP has noted that the phenomenon raised "many legal and political issues". This important matter is therefore on the agenda also at this Meeting.

The new Secretariat in Buenos Aires has just started functioning. This Meeting has been planned by the members of the Secretariat in cooperation with those responsible

here in Sweden. An important task for the parties is to support the Secretariat so that it can become an effective and efficient tool to assist them in their future work.

We have two weeks of intense labour ahead of us, starting today the 6th of June – Sweden's National Day. However, we have seen to it that there are breaks in the schedule for some time to be together and to get further information about what is now happening on the Antarctic continent.

A particularly important ingredient in meetings that deal with as vast areas of work as yours is the contacts and the connections that are established during the meetings and not least outside the conference rooms. There is a creative dynamic here, which in itself is invaluable for the work and for the good results.

As the delegates will notice, we have located the Meeting in an environment where there are several museums. Presently, there are a number of exhibitions relating to Antarctica. We hope that you will find the opportunity to visit those exhibitions.

Once again, let me thank you for the confidence that you have given me to preside over this Meeting. I will do my utmost so that we can move ahead and so that also during this Meeting we can develop the Treaty regime. Above all, we must continue working indefatigably in the Antarctic Spirit.

Thank you for your attention!