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Mr/Madam Chairperson,

The latest reports from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), published earlier this year, leaves little doubt that humans are changing the global climate. Indeed, it is increasingly clear that efforts to curb emissions – no matter how large – will have little effect on the projected climate changes up to about 2030. In other words, it is no longer a question of reducing greenhouse gas emissions or adapting to climate change; both are needed.

Two groups of countries where climate change poses particular challenges are the Arctic and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). It is an honour for me to present here today a new programme called Many Strong Voices, funded by the Norwegian Government, aiming to bring together experiences and expertise from these two groups of countries.

The Arctic and SIDS have much in common in relation to climate change, their geographical separation notwithstanding.

*First*, coastal communities in the Arctic and SIDS are experiencing the effects of climate change first-hand. The effects of rising temperatures, changing rainfall and snow patterns, shifts in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, and projected changes in sea level could threaten the ecology, economies as well as the social and cultural fabric of both groups of countries, undermining sustainable development.

*Second*, because of their close ties to land and sea environments, economies and cultures in both regions are vulnerable to climate change. Arctic and SIDS communities have a wealth of knowledge on the environments they live in and have demonstrated high ability to adapt to changing conditions in the past; however, climatic changes occur in a situation with a number of other changes to the societies, posing large challenges to their adaptive capacity.

And *third*, the Arctic and SIDS are both in the forefront in terms of research on vulnerability, impacts and adaptation. Several notable initiatives have been undertaken to assess the extent and impact of climate change. Research on SIDS have been carried out through (among others) the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre. In the Arctic, a major effort was undertaken with the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (2005).

In recognition of these common experiences and challenges faced by the residents of the Arctic and SIDS countries, the Many Strong Voices (MSV) programme was launched at a roundtable organized by UNEP/GRID-Arendal at the 11<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the Climate Convention in Montreal, December 2005. Among the speakers were Klaus Toepfer, former Executive Director of UNEP, Taito Nakalevu of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, and Sheila Watt-Cloutier of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference.

Many Strong Voices attempts to link the practical needs of adaptation in the Arctic and SIDS with the moral imperative of cutting greenhouse gas emissions. At its heart climate change and the effects it is having on the world's most vulnerable regions is the great moral challenge of our age. Whether we manage to reduce emissions to levels that will prevent climatic changes that present dangers to ecosystems and societies is a question that is now beginning to galvanize world opinion.

At the same time we must respond and adapt the best we can to the effects of climate change that are already upon us. Nowhere is this more apparent and urgent than in the SIDS and the Arctic. How the world responds to the situation faced by the people of Tuvalu and the Maldives, and of Shishmaref in Alaska and Clyde River in the Canadian Arctic, will say much about our collective sense of justice and fairness.

The MSV programme aims to bring together stakeholders in the Arctic and Small Island Developing States to enhance the resilience and adaptive capacity of these regions. It has three main objectives:

1. First, to collaborate and build capacity in the Arctic and Small Island Developing States so that people in these countries have a stronger voice in negotiations for emission reduction as well as developing and strengthening adaptation strategies.
2. Second, to raise awareness about the effects of climate change on vulnerable regions in general and on the Arctic and Small Island Developing States in particular, globally to highlight the need for mitigation, but also importantly within vulnerable regions to empower people and increase their capacity to respond to climate change.
3. And third, to increase understanding of needs and solutions, and take practical measures on adaptation by developing community-driven research, undertake practical, on-the-ground projects on adaptation in coastal communities in the Arctic and Small Island Developing States, disseminate locally tailored information and tools about climate change, and to identify and promote mechanisms for funding adaptation needs.

The programme is developing along a number of parallel tracks, including research, assessment, networking, support to communities, communication and outreach, as well as action on mitigation. It will be coordinated by two Norway-based institutions, CICERO and UNEP/GRID-Arendal in collaboration with a wide range of institutions within and outside Arctic and SIDS countries. A first step towards implementation will be to bring together stakeholders in the Arctic and SIDS countries at a workshop later this month in Belize. The workshop will provide a forum for stakeholders to discuss the latest research and policy developments in their respective regions. The main objective of the workshop is to develop a scoping study on options for a comparative assessment of coastal impacts of climate change in the Arctic and SIDS. It will also prepare a five-year Action Plan for Many Strong Voices, setting out milestones and outcomes for collaborative research, policy, communications, capacity-building, and fund-raising.

Thank you for your attention.