YOPP 13. – 15. juli 2015, Geneve.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have ten minutes to introduce you to the world of oil spill preparedness, prevention and response, or that part of it that could have a particular relevance given the theme of the Summit.

The most important challenges facing us in the years to come will be the effect of the climate changes. The Polar regions, though physically remote from the population centers on the globe, have profound significance for the planet as a thermostat to stabilize the Earth's climate. They act not only as regulators of global temperature, but also as barometers of change. This is not a surprise to you, nor that we should expect severe consequences globally as a result of these changes. But in parallel with the predicted negative effects of the climate changes, the very same changes will bring new opportunities to the table. I have in mind new sea routes, taking advantage of the withdrawal of the ice cap, opening up for a commercial use of the Arctic Ocean for a longer period every year. This is happening already, as you all know well. And sometime in a not too distant future , it is likely that even the North Pole itself will open up, allowing for commercial traffic to appear, at least for a couple of weeks every year. However, the situation concerning the ice conditions must be predictable and secure before trans-Arctic shipping lanes become a reality on a more regular basis. Although the level of trans-Arctic shipping is uncertain, many have until quite recently expected oil exploration and extraction activities to intensify in the region. And this could still happen. As no surprise, a higher level of activities might as well result in an increase of oil spills in the Arctic. We don't want that to happen. Not in Norwegian waters, not in the High North at all. Let me underline that Norwegian authorities regards oil spill prevention, preparedness and response as very important. This is not just because large oil spills are very costly to clean up, or because such spills may disrupt the shipping and petroleum industry (activities).

The primary reason why we need effective preventive measures and a robust and efficient preparedness and response system is that we simply cannot afford to jeopardize the marine environment. Unfortunately, the marine environment and many marine ecosystems are very vulnerable to acute pollution such as oil spills. Spills in the Arctic may have toxicological effects that are not yet understood, but with potentially severe effects on the ecosystems. The effects of oil spills in high latitude, and cold ocean environments may last longer and cause greater damage than further south. And to put it straight; the behavior of oil spills in cold and icy waters is not well understood. To detect and handle oil spills in the ice has proven to be pretty difficult. To my knowledge we need more research and development to identify a clean up strategy that works sufficiently well in all ice conditions. For instance, in colder water temperatures, there will be less organisms to break down the oil through microbial degradation. Oil spills may get trapped in ice, and could in theory remain in the ice for years. This is of course a concern if you foresee an increased shipping activity under Arctic conditions.

The remoteness of the area where incidents might happen in combination with harsh weather conditions and darkness, particular during winter, contributes to make oil spill operations in this area to some kind of extreme sport more than a smooth operation. The long distances is a particular challenge in this regard, where the operator must depend upon equipment and resources from ships or platforms operating in a rather autonomous way.

There are several paths you can follow to prevent maritime accidents to happen. Of especial importance are measures that provide for ample time to respond to incidents and to activate emergency towage and oil spill response procedures. I would like to draw your attention to the

improvements in monitoring and surveillance systems we have seen over the last years. To Norway, the Norwegian AIS satellite is perhaps the single most important innovation in this respect. The satellite detects AIS signals from ships, and has dramatically enhanced our oversight over maritime activities in the Arctic. Improved maritime awareness is useful both in resource control, preparedness and response to acute pollution and in search and rescue operations. We launched another AIS satellite last year to improve the reliability of satellite based detection of AIS signals. The implementation of new technology, in particular detection of AIS signals from satellites, give us near real time information on maritime activities in the entire Arctic area, including remote ocean areas. It is obvious that this has proved very helpful to follow day-to-day activities at large in the region. Improved monitoring improves our ability to assist vessels in distress and to carry out effective Search and Rescue operations (SAR) when needed. Today, we are also able to analyze traffic density and traffic patterns in greater detail than previously. Such analyzes are useful in assessing the need for various risk measures.

Nevertheless, and despite these advances in capacity and competence, a large oil spill in the Arctic will present a massive challenge to our response organization. To be realistic; none of the Arctic states currently have the capacity to handle a large oil spill in the High North alone. However, if we join forces and to some degree pool our resources and competence, we will be in a much better position to prevent ir-reparable damage to the vulnerable ecosystems in this part of the world. Frankly speaking, there is a gap in the international society's ability to handle spills in the Arctic, at least in the international part of the Arctic. From my point of view, international cooperation on prevention, preparedness and response is a prerequisite in order to meet the challenges brought about by increasing activity. Operating in the Arctic requires a collective effort among stakeholders that could include domestic regulatory regimes as well as international collaborative fora such as the Arctic Council. And over the last years we have witnessed some very promising initiatives on behalf of the Arctic Council. The eight member states have demonstrated a clear and present will to take responsibility when it comes to handle oil pollution in the Arctic. Much is left to be done, but we are – to my knowledge – on the right track.

There already exist a rather broad cooperation among the states bordering the North-Atlantic Ocean at a regional level. Although agreements have proven to be of utmost importance when incidents have occurred, they are not of particular relevance when it comes to handling incidents in the Arctic. And as Rome was not built on one day, it will take time to establish a robust international cooperation regime on prevention, preparedness and response to oil spill in the Arctic. However, we should approach this work stepwise, and jointly construct a platform brick by brick to rely on in the future. But it will take some time, and as long as states have individual interests, this work will probably not be known for their giant leaps forward.

As I am about to end my short intervention, allow me to emphasize that the probability of accidents in the Arctic is still significantly lower than in other sea areas due to limited traffic. And we expect this to be status quo for quite some time. However, the consequences of accidents in the Arctic are potentially severe and the consequences are not to be underestimated.