Kangerlussuaq July 28th 2007

Dear Senator Boxer, dear Connie Hedegaard, dear everybody.

As the environmental minister and on behalf of the Greenland Government, I would like to bid you all a warm welcome to Greenland, hoping that you will get first hand experience of the consequences of climate change in the Arctic. Looking back at my own life, I can only confirm that the climate in Greenland today is very different from the time when I was a child. I was born and raised in the southern part of the Disco bay. The sea ice closed the bay and made it impossible for ships to go there from December until the end of May. The hunters went on the sea ice with there dog teams to catch food.

These days the sea ice is formed in March, and disappears just a few weeks later. Some years it is not possible to go by dog team on the ice at all.

Living conditions for the hunters are deteriorating as the years go by. I went to the north of Greenland, close to Thule Airbase, in May with our Premier Mr. Hans Enoksen and another minister colleague. It was hard to hear the stories that the local politicians told of how the hunters have to live their lives today. Until 15 years ago, the hunters in the Thule region could hunt walrus on the sea ice during a period of 6 months each year, today if they are lucky they can hunt on the sea ice for just 2 months.

We also see signs of other animals that are under pressure because of the receding sea ice. I can inform you that we have had to give permission to kill polar bears and polar bears with cubs, because they have wandered into towns and villages to seek food, because they cannot hunt on the sea ice.

We cannot change the natural climate variation, but we do have the possibility to influence the manmade influence on climate change. It is of the outmost importance that we decrease the emissions of greenhouse gases drastically, to reduce the impact on the climate. Climate change is a global problem, but the consequences can be reduced if we take on the responsibility globally. A manmade problem should have a manmade solution.

Once again I would like to welcome you to Greenland. I hope that you by this visit will see how spectacular nature can be and why we have to cooperate to preserve our wonderful planet, Earth.

[Remarks of Mr. Arkalo Abelsen
Greenlandic Minister of the Environment
Speaking to the U.S. Senate delegation visiting Greenland]