It is a pleasure to participate in the 4th China – Nordic Arctic Cooperation Symposium here in Rovaniemi.

We Finns regard the whole of Finland as an Arctic country, but it is true that the City of Rovaniemi has a special significance. It is the place where Arctic cooperation was put on the international political agenda a quarter of a century ago in the first-ever Arctic ministerial meeting, and where the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy was adopted.

The Rovaniemi spirit of Arctic cooperation is very much alive, and the Arctic Center of the University of Lapland is an important think tank with a wide network of cooperation all over the world.

Arctic cooperation activities between China, Finland and the Nordic countries have been well established. The strengthening of these networks is warmly welcomed. The future of the Arctic region is a global concern, and both Arctic and non-Arctic countries should be involved. The protection of the Arctic environment and the promotion of sustainable development in the Arctic region should be based on the best available research.

+++ People in Finland are quite well adapted to cold climates. It is in our tradition to carefully observe the four seasons and plan our activities accordingly. Winter is one of the seasons, and most Finns actually enjoy a real winter with freezing temperatures and plenty of snow.

In Finland and especially here in Lapland we have been able to welcome more and more Chinese visitors, who also enjoy experiencing our cold climate and Northern nature covered with snow and ice.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Finland is a leading country in developing state-of-the-art technology for the cold climate and for demanding Arctic conditions. Finnish Arctic expertise covers areas like shipping and marine technology, mining, transport, housing and meteorology.
Finland’s economy depends on our trade relations with other countries. Since the 1960’s all Finnish harbours have been kept open all year round by Finnish-built icebreakers. Thanks to that strategic decision, made half-a-century ago, all of Finland is open for business all year round. Finland designs and builds icebreakers for our own fleet and for other who need them in polar conditions. Also China has is using Finnish icebreaker design for its next icebreaker.

China certainly has important Arctic connections to the Arctic. The opening up of the Arctic Ocean may bring China and the Nordic countries closer together through the Northeast Passage. That route was first sailed through in the expedition led by the Finnish-born Arctic explorer Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld a century and a half ago.

+++ Climate change is of course a global concern but it is definitely the most challenge in the Arctic. It will form a general framework for all Arctic activities in the foreseeable future. Sound scientific assessments have been prepared by world-class researchers on how the warming climate will affect the Arctic Ocean, Arctic land areas and Arctic inhabitants.

Recommendations based on scientific research are well-known. Both mitigation and adaptation measures will be needed. Northern and Arctic communities must be made more resilient to survive the changing conditions and the rapidly advancing globalization.

The climate agreement reached in Paris last December is of great importance for the Arctic region, its nature and its inhabitants. Finland coordinates climate negotiations with the other countries members of the European Union, and we wholeheartedly certainly welcomed the agreement.

In the final stages of the climate negotiations, China and the United States showed leadership, which paved the way to a global agreement. The international community should make sure that the commitments are fully implemented. But we should also keep climate issues under constant observation to see what additional measures should be taken.

+++ Responsible use of natural resources and the increasing opportunities for transport and communication will require new steps. Finding a balance between economic development and the protection of the Arctic environment is key to sustainable development.

Solutions should be based on international law. The Arctic countries and in some cases the coastal states of the Arctic Ocean have taken initiatives to guide the stewardship of the region. Also non-
Arctic countries that are interested in Arctic developments should have an opportunity to be involved in such efforts.

The member states of the Arctic Council member states have negotiated two binding agreements (Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic, Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic). Both agreements have already entered into force.

A fisheries moratorium in Central Arctic Ocean has been proposed by the five Arctic coastal states, and negotiations with other countries, including China, are underway.

In Arctic maritime transportation, the prospects are that we should expect a steady increase, including in the Northeast Passage.

It will be necessary to invest in the safety of Arctic transportation by providing adequate communications facilities, weather services, harbor facilities, ice-breaking capacity as well as search and rescue capabilities.

The IMO Polar Code will be implemented from the beginning of 2017. It is a remarkable achievement, promoting the safety of humans and protecting the marine environment. It also shows that navigating Arctic waters is exceptionally demanding, and it requires stricter than normal standards.

Ladies and gentlemen,

From the early 1990’s, the Arctic region has been a convincing example of peaceful international cooperation. The Arctic remains a stable region, where the risk of military confrontation is low.

The eight Arctic countries, member states of the Arctic Council, have confirmed that they are willing to tackle Arctic issues together, and they want to do it in close cooperation with the indigenous peoples who live in the Arctic. Peaceful and constructive cooperation is the broad message that the Arctic Council wants to send, when it celebrates its 20th Anniversary this year.

The European Union, in its 3rd Arctic communication, released a month ago, also confirmed its will to contribute to the peace, stability and constructive cooperation of the Arctic region.

Finland will soon have a special role in Arctic cooperation. The United States will chair the Arctic Council until May 2017, and then hand over the chairmanship to Finland for the following two years. Then in 2019 Finland will pass on the chairmanship to Iceland. Continuity between chairmanships is
necessary. Finland wants to develop Arctic cooperation in the long term so that it will adequately address the enormous challenges and benefit the region and its inhabitants.

Thank you.