

ICASS VI – Nuuk, August 22, 2008

Thank you Yvon, and let me take the opportunity to thank for your visionary and dedicated effort to make ICASS VI happen.

Honoured guests, dear ICASS VI participants,

We know from earlier testimonies that many colleagues who attend ICASS consider them among the most enjoyable and productive conferences they participate in. Many of you must have waited for this edition with impatience. This time around, the usual interval of three years has been expanded to four. We owe an explanation for that: one of the reasons for this delay is that we wanted to welcome this conference in the best possible venue. The University of Greenland moved into its new premises in January of this year. This is the first large conference taking place within its walls. Ilimmarfik represents a symbol of education and research capacity building in the Arctic, and this in the first Indigenous autonomous state of the region. Another reason for delaying this congress a bit is that it was conceived as a forum to exchange first results from International Polar Year projects, and to network these projects with other current research in the North. Our only regret is that placing a congress in August alienates the community of archaeologists from the rest of us: many sent their regrets, but were taking advantage of the summer season to excavate in less harsh conditions.

The overall theme:

Arctic Social Sciences: Prospects for the International Polar Year 2007-2008 Era and Beyond

is of course IPY, but not just IPY: social sciences in the IPY era. There is more to social sciences than just IPY now, and there will be social sciences after IPY, hopefully on an increased level and functioning on a renewed paradigm.

Papers presented belong to different research programs, some of which overlap. E.g. some BOREAS projects are also endorsed as IPY projects.

Despite the mentions “open” or “by invitation only” in the program, all sessions are open to all listeners. “By invitation” applied only to paper proposers, and was due to the fact that some research programs benefit from meeting here.

Both the variety of themes and the many different approaches are reflected in the Program and ‘Book of Abstracts’ – the latter distributed on the ICASS web site – and both handed out to the ICASS VI participants.

At an early stage – based on the feedback and input we got on the first call for session abstracts – we decided to organise the presentations and discussions into 11 themes:

- Sustainability and climate change
- Economic development
- Politics, justice and governance
- Living conditions
- Language, literature and media

- Culture, religion, history and science
- Health
- Material culture and archaeology
- Outreach and education
- Inclusive research, and
- IPY, International Polar Year

This thematic approach provided a framework for the local organizing committee and the organizers when setting up the final program.

In the final program we have a total number of 52 different subject sessions – including a poster session – with more than 250 papers to be presented. There are 330 registered participants from 23 different countries. Moreover there will be participation of numerous stakeholders from Greenland, who will register by the day, and who will attend ICASS events open to the public, e.g. the IPY day including the joint public meeting with Inuit Circumpolar Council.

The ICASS organizers, with support from sponsors, have made a special effort to fund participants who have little opportunity to get funding from the usual channels for confirmed scholars: young researchers, indigenous researchers, and researchers from countries with less-well endowed funding institutions. I am happy to inform you that this effort has increased the number of participants significantly. Declining some qualified applicants, though, were among the hardest decisions to take.

It was a goal from the very start that Arctic social science and cultural activities should both be part of ICASS VI for several reasons – not least to make outreach to the general public easier. We did not fully live up to our expectations, but a mini film festival and other cultural activities like those you already have experienced and e.g. the music dance theatre ‘What is really going on around the North Pole’ that you will see tonight are part of what we intended

Members of the local organizing committee and not least a small but dedicated, enthusiastic and hard working staff (you can tell them by their black ‘Greenland is cool’ t-shirts) – mostly students. A great thank to you – you have been excellent!

We still have five congress days ahead but we can already express our gratitude to the sponsors (in alphabetical order):

- Commission for Scientific Research in Greenland, KVUG
- European Science Foundation (EUROCORE programme BOREAS)
- Greenland Home Rule Government, Ministry of Education, Research, Culture and the Church
- Ilisimatusarfik, the University of Greenland and Ilimmarfik
- Nordic Council of Ministers
- NunaFonden
- NAPA, Nordic Institute of Greenland
- Nuuk Municipality
- Polar Seafood
- US National Science Foundation, Arctic Social Sciences Program

In Katuaq, our cultural centre and Ilimmarfik, the Campus hosting Ilisimatusarfik and other knowledge based institutions we are all going to spend a lot of time the coming days with hopefully inspiring discussions and creative thinking based on solidly founded knowledge and theoretical insight.

The idea of Greenland hosting IASSA and an ICASS was brought to the table at ICASS IV in Quebec City, 2001 and the decision taken after ICASS V in Fairbanks, 2004 is now to be realised in ICASS VI in Nuuk.

The stage is set, and it is now up to you to create the synergy that will give life to a paradigm established by ICARP 2 -- that Arctic social sciences, with their focus on people and on the development of human society in the Arctic, play a central role in Arctic science overall.

From all of us on the organizing team, welcome to Greenland – and best wishes for a very productive congress! The congress is open