

# **SPEECH FROM THE YOUTH TO THE ARCTIC LEADERS**

## **Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting 2019**

7th of May Rovaniemi Lappi Areena

Your excellencies

My name is Julia Wright, student of University of Helsinki and volunteer worker for WWF Finland

And my name is Pétur Halldórsson, chair of Icelandic Youth Environmentalist Association.

We are here with local youth from Rovaniemi, who are members of ICCAY, International Climate Challenge for the Arctic Youth. It's a project initiated by the youth themselves. The aim of the project is to inspire other youth and raise awareness about the environment and climate issues.

We are grateful for this opportunity to speak to you today.

What would the Arctic be without youth? This might seem like a strange question, but it would inevitably lead to the end of culture in the Arctic. And without culture we lose the common understanding which is essential for international and cross-cultural cooperation.

During the Finland chairmanship there have been very positive steps made towards including youth in the Arctic, for example with the Arctic Youth Summit last October which we participated in. We were empowered by all the smart and motivated young people from all around the Arctic and beyond. We all shared the same concern about the future of the Arctic - the concern over climate change, biodiversity, social issues, and state of local communities, including indigenous people. We were concerned over our home, the Arctic. Like one of the participants said: "We are different, but the Arctic unites us."

- At the summit we met Gabe from Alaska whose community, home, needs to be relocated due to erosion and thawing permafrost.
- We met Sanna from Sweden, a reindeer herder, whose community lost almost 200 reindeer due to weak ice.
- We met Tasha from Alaska who is experiencing climate change first hand by witnessing melting glaciers.
- We met Anastasia from Russia who is protesting against the forest in her area being turned into landfills.

But how do we deal with these challenges together?

There's a lot of talk concerning climate change nowadays, but the actions are not ambitious enough. We need to work harder towards sustainable future and we need to include everyone in that process. Youth need to be able to participate in Arctic issues, regardless of background, identity and other factors.

To do our part in this, we have created the Arctic Youth Network, which already has youth in 40 countries who have dedicated their time towards working together on Arctic issues. The uniting concept of the Arctic Youth Network has been a focus on how climate change, biodiversity and cultural equality are interconnected.

So we already have these platforms that connect young changemakers together, like ICCAY and the Arctic Youth Network, but Arctic issues cannot be solved solely by youth or solely by governments, so effective cooperation is needed.

The way to solve Arctic challenges together is therefore strategic and systematic social inclusion of youth in the Arctic. We need you to include us in the process of developing government policy and recognize that youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but also the leaders of today. Once we have this, we will have an effective approach to solving Arctic issues together.

I will be 70 years old in 2063. Today, there are a lot of uncertainties of how the world will look like when we are in that age. We need those uncertainties to be dealt with. For us to be able to trust our future we need a system change and we need you to be brave enough to do those changes. Climate change isn't a future issue, it is a current issue, and it is clear that the current way of doing things is not working.

Youth all around the Arctic are now ready to act, and we have to solve Arctic issues together. Are you ready include us?

Julia Wright, Finland  
WWF Finland Youth volunteer  
Phone: +358 40 562 5248

Pétur Halldórsson, Iceland  
The chair of Icelandic Youth Environmentalist Association  
and the founder of Arctic Youth Network  
Phone: +354-848-3540