

## Climate change 'did not originate' in the Arctic, conference hears

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News

The high-profile event on the Arctic was told that “very concerted action” is now necessary to combat global warming.



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The international community, including the EU, has been told that climate change “did not originate” in the Arctic.

Bard Ivar Svendsen, ambassador for the Arctic at the Norwegian foreign affairs ministry, said, “The climate changes we are seeing in the Arctic are very dramatic. But we also have to remember that a lot of these changes did not actually originate in the Arctic but are the result of things like pollution in other parts of the world.”

He also told the conference in Brussels on Monday that renewed efforts were needed to ensure that the currently “thriving” communities in the Arctic could survive.

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The conference comes just ahead of the keenly-awaited COP25 climate conference in Madrid.

The “Arctic Futures Symposium 2019” was co-organised by the Brussels-based International Polar Foundation and Brussels Capital Region. The aim was to highlight a range of Arctic affairs as well as climate change.

Einar Gunnarsson, ambassador for Arctic affairs at the Icelandic foreign affairs ministry, gave a stark warning about the impact of climate change, saying that even if EU Member States and other countries meet the targets set out by the Paris Agreement, the world can still expect “strong and significant climate change” until the middle of this century.

The Paris Agreement sets out a global framework to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2°C.

“A lot of these changes did not actually originate in the arctic but are the result of things like pollution in other parts of the world” **Bard Ivar Svendsen, ambassador for the arctic at the Norwegian foreign affairs ministry**

Gunnarsson said, “If we fail to meet these common goals then we have very good reason to be seriously concerned. And this, remember, is the best-case scenario.”

“Warming climate is having unprecedented influence worldwide and it is having an acute effect in our region. Our glaciers are retreating, our icecaps are thinning, our oceans are acidifying and rising. The consequences are both foreseeable and unforeseeable. They are tangible and intangible, visible and hidden.”

“We see new plants, animal species and natural phenomenon emerge and immigrate, while others change, retreat or disappear. The same holds true for human activity.”

“People are looking towards the Arctic and not only that, people are also increasingly moving, travelling and exploring possibilities for investments in the Arctic. The region’s identity is taking on a new shape. What used to be a relatively untouched region is fast developing into a melting pot for human activity.”

He added, “It is our common human responsibility to make sure that this melting pot does not boil

over and make a mess everywhere.”

He said the “primary responsibility” was to make sure that all activities in the Arctic, both established and new, will be sustainable.

He told the packed audience, “We need to keep our eyes on the temperature. It shouldn’t rise over 1,5°C and certainly not over 2°C. Here we all have a shared responsibility. And for that we have numerous tools at our disposal.”

“Our glaciers are retreating, our icecaps are thinning, our oceans are acidifying and rising. The consequences are both foreseeable and unforeseeable” **Einar Gunnarsson, ambassador for Arctic affairs at the Icelandic foreign affairs ministry**

He underlined the role of the Arctic Council which is also comprised of three EU Member States - Denmark, Sweden and Finland.

The Council, he said, is becoming increasingly inclusive in its core work, in gathering, organising and analysing science-based knowledge that policy makers and politicians, in and beyond the Arctic, can use to make “enlightened” decisions.

“The Arctic Council is unique in that it gives the representatives of the indigenous peoples of the Arctic a seat at the table along with its eight member states. It also has 39 observers and the EU following, and to a considerable extent participating, in its work.”

He said that the role of the private sector was also important, including the Arctic Economic Council, founded at the initiative of the Arctic Council.

“It is an independent body comprised of representatives from the circumpolar business community and the indigenous peoples of the arctic.”

He added, “In the face of today’s challenges we have to choose the right path forward. We need to strengthen environmental protection, economic development and social development in the Arctic.”

## **About the author**

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