Remarks of the
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At the Opening Session of the
International workshop on
Global Change in the Arctic and Co-production of Knowledge
27 to 29 September 2012, Paris, France

Distinguished experts, both scientific and indigenous, ladies and gentlemen,

- Anthropogenic climate change is transforming the world that we live in.
- The Arctic regions are at the forefront of that change with temperatures rising at twice the global average.
- 2012 is expected to be a record year for the decline of the polar ice cap, surpassing the previous extreme attained in September 2007.
- This rapid and unprecedented change is an immense challenge for the peoples of the Arctic who are truly on the frontlines of climate change.

- But it is also an immense challenge for the global community, and also a challenge for science.

- It is increasingly clear that conventional and disciplinary science does not have the firepower required to confront the challenge of achieving sustainable development in a global context that is increasingly complex and that is undergoing rapid change.

- Earlier this year in the run-up to Rio+20, the UN Secretary-General Ban-ki-Moon chose UNESCO to take the lead in setting up a Science Advisory Board that is to provide policy advice at the highest level, based on the best available knowledge about global environmental challenges.

- While this decision brings first and foremost recognition and provides a great impetus to science, it is also an enormous responsibility. It's an engagement of the scientific community to provide sound counsel on global challenges of unprecedented proportion.

- In order to deliver on this demand, science will have to do no less than reinvent itself, to become more solution-oriented and to cut across the disciplinary boundaries that constrain innovative thinking and effective action.

- This was the main thrust of the international experts meeting organized by UNESCO with support from the Principality of Monaco in 2009 on 'Climate Change and Arctic Sustainable Development: scientific, social, cultural and

educational challenges". Making the most of its broad transdisciplinary mandate, UNESCO brought together a wide range of experts from the natural and social sciences, as well as indigenous peoples, from across the circumpolar North.

- In a similar spirit, the central topic of your deliberations over the coming days relates to a theme that emerged in debates earlier this year in the framework of Rio+20. The concept of 'co-production of knowledge' found a certain resonance in the Rio debates and was echoed in discussions on emerging global initiatives such as IPBES – the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - and also Future Earth, the new science-based initiative that is to draw into one the global efforts of the Human Dimensions programme, the Geosphere-Biosphere programme, Diversitas, and the World Climate Research Programme, amongst others.

- Even though the concept of 'knowledge co-production' remains elusive and has yet to be clearly defined, … even though it is clear that it encapsulates different meanings for different people, it is interesting to witness the broad rallying of voices around this term.

- Perhaps because it underlines the need for new knowledge to be produced, and thus implicitly reaffirms that current knowledge is not enough?

- Perhaps because co-production underlines the need for partnerships in knowledge production, partnerships that cut across boundaries, not only among bio-physical science disciplines, but also between natural and social sciences.

- Perhaps also because partnerships in knowledge production reach out beyond the sciences to other knowledge systems, to knowledge holders amongst indigenous peoples and from local communities across the globe.

- In this regard, the Arctic regions provide leadership for the rest of the world. The Arctic, and in particular Arctic peoples, have engaged in numerous ground-breaking efforts at bridging between scientific and indigenous knowledge. Several decades of work on various forms of knowledge co-production have been carried out in Arctic settings, the most recent being the illustrious International Polar Year (IPY).

- This meeting brings together a unique ensemble of expertise from across the circumpolar North. Your deliberations here on knowledge co-production based on your in-depth and first-hand experience with environmental observing systems rooted in indigenous communities, will provide leadership for other

world regions and for emerging global efforts such as IPCC, IPBES and Future Earth.

- I wish you the all the best with your deliberations. And I congratulate you on the leadership that you will certainly be providing by blazing the trail for indigenous-scientific knowledge co-production that others will undoubtedly soon be following.