



--- Embargoed until delivery on Tuesday, 24 May 2022, around 10:00 a.m. ---

Speech by State Secretary Jennifer Morgan at the opening session of the 44th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting

Berlin, 24 May 2022

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Welcome to Berlin and to the first physical Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting after two years of pandemic. – Welcome also to those of you participating remotely, from all parts of the world. We are all here because we are drawn to the magical white continent – its inherent beauty and mystery, its vital role in our striving to live in balance with the earth, its protected status under the Environmental Protocol-, the 30th anniversary of which we celebrated last year in Madrid. It is unique, beautiful, vital for our own life on this earth, and we are grateful for all of the work over the decades of scientists... that have worked to protect this special place.

Thus, you have a very important task ahead of you: to discuss and decide measures on the management and the protection of the white continent. Why is this continent 14.000 km away from Germany so important for all of us? – Shifts in the Antarctic climate have consequences for the health of the climate around the world. I know when have spoken to scientists over the last decades, it was Antarctica they were watching so closely for signals that could have a massive impact on hundreds of millions of people. The Antarctic Ice Sheet mass loss is projected to contribute substantially to global mean sea level rise. If parts of the Antarctic ice cap melt, it could trigger a rise in sea-level affecting coastlines all over the world, including here in Europe! The number of people affected by sea level rise until 2070 – to which the Antarctic Ice Sheet could contribute – is estimated to be highest in coastal cities in Asia; the estimated damage in terms of economic values is estimated to be highest in cities like Miami, New York, Tokyo, Amsterdam/Rotterdam.

It is therefore not possible to just pause the management of the Antarctic. We must move forward – although it is not an easy decision to come together here in Berlin at the negotiation table while one Consultative Party is waging war on another Consultative Party.

Russia is waging an unjustifiable, unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. Russia has violated the UN Charter and other fundamental principles of international law. I call on Russia to put an end to the war it started and to end the tragic suffering and loss of life it continues to cause. I call on Russia to immediately comply with the legally binding order of the International Court of Justice and to abide by the relevant resolutions of the UN General Assembly and stop its military aggression – to cease fire, and immediately and unconditionally withdraw its troops from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

This breach of international law by a Consultative Party is also contrary to the spirit of the Antarctic Treaty. The Antarctic Treaty has successfully promoted international cooperation in Antarctica for decades. It was signed when the Cold War was at its height. It was amazing that the states were actually able to agree to use Antarctica exclusively for peaceful purposes and to avoid a confrontation over unclarified territorial claims.

The result is peaceful scientific and logistical cooperation between the Contracting Parties in the interest of all mankind. The Antarctic Treaty is widely seen as a prominent example of well functioning multilateralism. This is something we want to preserve – and this although the loss of confidence in the aggressor party in terms of its compliance with international obligations is evident. I call upon all Parties participating in this Meeting to bear the special history of the Antarctic Treaty in mind and to take responsibility for the protection of this unique and vulnerable ecosystem, and not to block important decisions for reasons unrelated to Antarctic interests.

There is strong urgency to care for the white continent. Recently, Antarctica has sent out some very worrisome signals to us: In February this year, Antarctic sea ice hit a record-low minimum. And just a few weeks after that record-low sea-ice event, a shocking heat wave sent temperatures in East Antarctica up to unprecedented heights. During the third week of March, research stations in East Antarctica recorded temperatures up to 40 degrees Celsius above the month's average.

What happens in Antarctica does not stay in Antarctica, as I said before. Therefore understanding and monitoring the continent is crucial for the survival of all of us on the planet. „From science via policy to protection“: as is shown in the exhibition in the margins of this conference, Germany contributes with cutting-edge research to enhancing our knowledge about the white continent. The Alfred-Wegener Institute, the Neumayer research station, the research ice-breaker Polarstern are only the most well-known names in terms of German contributions to Antarctic research.

Based on scientific results, the right decisions for protection can be taken. To protect and maintain biodiversity in Antarctica and to counteract the effects of climate change, the establishment of a network of protected areas is key, and some well prepared proposals in this regard, concerning various land areas of the Antarctic continent, will be discussed during the Meeting. Let me also mention, even if this is not subject of discussion during this conference, that we must continue working together for new marine protected areas in the Southern Ocean, particularly in the Weddell Sea and East Antarctica. These are the last mostly untouched marine areas on the planet, which provide irreplaceable habitat for many species.

One last observation on another urgent topic for this Meeting. The pause in Antarctic tourism caused by the pandemic is easing, touristic activities will rebound. Before the pandemic, in the 2019/2020 season, tourism numbers reached a new peak with nearly 75.000 tourists visiting Antarctica. The potential for expanding polar tourism to Antarctica seems huge! We must be prudent. I encourage you, the ATCM delegates, to find a strategic approach on how to sustainably manage touristic activities, which have to meet the stringent requirements of environmental protection.

All these considerations show: it is crucial to maintain the Antarctic Treaty System functioning, so that we can keep Antarctica as a demilitarized continent where peaceful international research cooperation can take place and protection standards are high. Germany is ready to accept this responsibility for the unique and vital ecosystem Antarctica, both by hosting this conference even in these difficult times, and by our commitment to strive with all of you to ensure it can stay the beautiful, essential place in the world it is, for all of us.

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