

State Secretary Jennifer Morgan,

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Delegates,

I am delighted to welcome you here today to kick off the ATCM. It is nice that so many of us are finally able to meet again here in person in Berlin. And it's good that we are all so skilled in online communication by now – our virtual participants can contribute across multiple time zones.

Antarctica has always been a continent that embodies the idea of peaceful use. Even at times when nations were at great odds, joint cooperation in Antarctica continued. During the Cold War, the Antarctic Treaty conferences served as a platform for the two sides to meet and work together for a common cause.

Today, we are faced with a new dimension of political challenges as a result of Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, which is in violation of international law. I condemn this aggression in the strongest possible terms. The German government is currently focusing all its efforts on stopping this injustice and putting an end to the suffering of the Ukrainian people and the global consequences of the war. And rightly so.

But despite the situation, we collectively decided to hold this conference. Our work for peace, research and environmental protection on this unique continent should not be compromised because of the aggression of one party against another.

I firmly believe that this is the right decision, as the global crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution will not wait for the war to end. Antarctica is particularly sensitive to the effects of these crises. It is up to us to tackle them together.

These are not new challenges. The Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty recently celebrated its 30th anniversary. We should protect and preserve all that we have worked so hard to accomplish over these 30 years. The treaty principles, among them the precautionary principle, should continue to guide us. It is important to keep infusing these principles with new life – a process that is helped by the wide range of important decisions we make here at ATCM.

I would like to highlight three:

Firstly, the global climate crisis will hit Antarctica particularly hard. One of its victims will be the **emperor penguin**. Scientists can already foresee that it will become an endangered species in the coming years. I am therefore committed to taking a significant step toward a stronger conservation status for the emperor penguin at this ATCM. This is exactly what the precautionary principle means in practice: not waiting for even more detailed scientific findings until this majestic bird is seriously endangered, but taking steps to protect the emperor penguin now.

Secondly, **protected areas** are essential to stop biodiversity loss. In Antarctica, they ensure that the pristine and unique flora and fauna is preserved through the establishment, review and adaptation of management plans. In the past, we have worked together to successfully designate a number of protected areas under the Antarctic Treaty. I am confident that we will be able to continue this important work over the next two weeks.

The German G7 presidency wants to make progress on the designation of protected areas under CCAMLR starting the day after tomorrow [26.5.2022] with the responsible G7 ministers. The G7 environment ministers will be just a few kilometres away from here at a meeting chaired by Federal Environment Minister Steffi Lemke.

And the third decision I would like to highlight: the global **pollution crisis** is also affecting Antarctica despite how far away the continent is. Microplastics can even be found there. I am encouraged that the mandate to negotiate a plastics convention by 2024 was adopted at the last United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) in Nairobi. Germany had pushed hard for this mandate and we will strongly support the negotiations. This ATCM will report on progress made in creating systematic and

better structured databases with environmental samples. These are important in efforts to document and monitor environmental impacts in Antarctica more effectively.

A special form of environmental pollution is underwater noise. Reducing noise levels is important for the protection of Antarctic wildlife, for example whales. Here in the conference centre we have set up what is called a sonic chair, where you can immerse yourself in the world of underwater sound. I would like to invite you to give it a try during the break.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For 30 years, Antarctica has been protected by the most comprehensive environmental protection rules ever established for any region of the world in a binding international treaty. For good reason. Your commitment and participation in this year's ATCM underscore the importance you attach to protecting Antarctica.

I believe that together we can further strengthen this preventative protection and preserve Antarctica's unique natural world. Especially during this time, let us set an example for joint crisis management, peaceful coexistence and multilateralism.