Welcome to Mo i Rana, and welcome to the fifth GeoNor conference!

We are now in a region and a county with a long tradition of mining and industry. A region will be important for production of minerals and industrial products in the future, not only for Norway but for Europe as well.

The GeoNor conference is organized by Nordland County together with SINTEF, The Geological Survey of Norway (NGU) and the Mining and Mineral Cluster Norway. The Knowledge Park Helgeland are the secretariat and facilitator.

GeoNor 2016 is held together with Nordmin. A project set up by the Nordic Council of Ministers. Nordmin aims to develop the Nordic mining and mineral industry in a sustainable manner.

This year’s conference theme is mining and environment.

What could be more relevant after the Paris Agreement last year?

The new Oslo international Airport will open in 2017. As governor of Nordland, I am satisfied with the fact that Avinor has chosen Fauske marble as their main ingredient in the new floors. Fauske is as a small town north of the polar circle.

But what about the carbon footprint of the marble stones? The Fauske marble is first shipped off to China. Here it is processed before it is sent back to Oslo.

Thus, the carbon footprint is negative – and at the same time – there is a negative industry output in our region.

One of our main political priorities is to create jobs in the mining industry. Jobs that are high up the value chain in the industry.

Every ninth farmed salmon eaten in the world has its origin in Nordland. In the industry of farmed salmon, we have the whole industrial value chain in our region. From the hatchery to the marketing of the product.

That is not the case within the mining industry. The question is therefore how can the mining industry learn from the seafood industry.
Barack Obama said something vise during the climate talks in Paris last year: “This one trend, climate change, affects all trends.”

This is also true for the mining industry.

There is a clear line from the global climate Paris agreement to the processing industry in our region.

The processing industry in Norway has the lowest carbon footprint in the world. Essentially our hydropower is carbon neutral.

Industry minerals and metals are crucial for the processing industry. There is a huge potential for a more climate friendly production if the processing industry used more minerals and metals from the region.

In addition, this would create more jobs.

In a way, that would be an industrial twist of how to kill two birds with one stone.

We are now in an area that has committed itself to create the greenest industrial park in the world. A tough, but realistic goal. Once again, hydropower is the main ingredient.

There are different interests between the mining industry and other resource-based industries such as fisheries, aquaculture and reindeer-husbandry to mention a few.

I am pleased that Ministry of Local Government and Modernization represents the government at the conference. The mineral industry is dependent on a predictable and proactive national policy. A predictable national policy could unlock a huge potential within the resource based and areal intensive industries of Northern Norway.

In Norway, there is an ongoing debate about the startup of mining operations both in Kvalsund (Nussir) and in Naustdal (Nordic Mining). A hot topic is the disposal of mineral waste into the seabed. There have also been long processes for Elkem until the company finally received approval for its plan for mining of quartz at Nasa on Saltfjellet.

This happens despite the fact that there has been extensive processes in relation to other interests. There are heavy restrictions on how the operations will take place, and how the environment will be maintained.

Most of these minerals and metals are important for our daily living. Quartz from Nasa is essential for the production of environmentally friendly products such as solar cells and other high-tech products. The value chain from high
purity quartz via silicon metal to the final products as solar cells will probably be the most sustainable in the world.

I think most people look at mining industry as professional. And that it intends to protect the environment. The processes at the three mentioned mines have been through extensive surveys and studies, and should be the basis for an environmentally friendly production.

The mining industry has a good standing reputation among many people in northern Norway. That is because of the importance of this industry in our region. Companies like Sibelco on Stjernøya, Skaland Graphite on Senja, Brønnøy Kalk and Verdalskalk to name a few, are important for the local communities.

In the future, we will see a growing understanding that we need these minerals and metals. And that we can produce them in a more carbon friendly way in Norway. The minerals must be an important part of the discussion when we discuss the climate solutions.

There are huge mineral resources in Northern Norway. Mapping of new minerals are vital for the industry. The last decade the Geological Survey of Norway (NGU) have received considerable funding to identify new minerals. In Northern Norway, we have a special program focusing on mapping our mineral resources.

Last year the Norwegian government stopped the funding for mapping of minerals in Norway.

The result on short term is that we as a regional authority finance some of the mapping in our region.

On the long term, we will lack the money. And let me add – to do the governments job.

Where’s the predictability in the Norwegian government’s mining policy?

NGU must be given sufficient funding to identify mineral deposits. It is not acceptable that NGU only receive funding for one year at a time. It must get funding for several years.

NGU is crucial to generate new geological information to the private as well as the public sector.

In Northern Norwegian, we have established a political Council – the Northern Norwegian Council. One of our first tasks is to create a common mineral strategy. Troms County Council is responsible for carrying out this work. The
objective is to give this industry good and predictable framework conditions, and good opportunities to develop the resources that exist here.

It is also important that educational and research institutions in our region meet the demands from the mineral industry. We have important institutions in northern Norway with the The Arctic University of Norway, North University, SINTEF, Norut Research Institute and vocational schools. But these also need to be good in cooperation with national and international environments.

The Mining and Mineral Cluster Norway is a collaboration between the mining and supply companies, research and educational institutions in northern Norway. I strongly believe that the Mining and Mineral Cluster Norway will bring forth exciting projects and develop existing and new businesses in this industry. Nordland County Council has since the starting up of the cluster supported this cooperation. The Mining and Mineral Cluster Norway can be an important and strong actor to restore the mining industry's position in North Norway, and in Norway.

Over the past five to six years, the Norwegian government have presented innovation and R&D strategies for different industries. Such as the Oil and Gas 21 strategy, the Maritime 21 strategy and the Ocean 21 strategy, to mention a few.

What about the mining industry? As far as I can tell, in Norway we lack a coherent R&D and innovation strategy for the mining industry.

Therefore, I propose a Mining 21 strategy. The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries should take an initiative.

We already have the actor to do it – the Mining and Mineral Cluster Norway could lead this work.

As one of the largest and most important mining regions of Norway, I could already now say that the county would financially support such an initiative.

One very important topic in the strategy would of course be mining and the environment.

Is it too ambitious to hope for a release at next year’s GeoNor conference?

Before any more promises are made from me I will once again welcome you all to Nordland and to Mo i Rana. And wish you all good luck with the GeoNor Conference 2016.