

**Address by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov
at the Fifth Ministerial Session of the Arctic Council, Salekhard,
October 26, 2006**

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Esteemed colleagues,

Now a whole decade separates us from the memorable meeting in Ottawa, where the eight Arctic states set up the Arctic Council, proclaiming as their common aim the ensuring of the prosperity of the inhabitants of the Arctic and its sustainable development.

Important favorable changes have occurred over these years in the Arctic, just as in the world as a whole. The arena of bloc confrontation in the years of the Cold War has become a kind of proving ground for collective action skills, an equal and mutually advantageous partnership, life-based and oriented towards the needs of people. That turn has been due to a heightened understanding in the northernmost region of the planet - with its colossal natural resources, fragile nature and the unique distinctiveness of its indigenous peoples - of the commonality of the interests of all states in the contemporary interdependent world. The activities of the Arctic Council have, unquestionably, been a major factor of these changes.

Having commenced in November 2004, Russia's chairmanship of the Council linked the further raising of the effectiveness of our common work with a more balanced nature of the three major components of the policy of ensuring sustainable development in the Arctic. While actively promoting the traditional priority environmental programs, we have sought to build up efforts in the social and economic fields. The aim was to see to it that the people in the North lived comfortably, in a clean natural environment and had a full-fledged access to education, social services and medical assistance.

Here are but some outcomes of the Chairmanship.

The formation of the Action Plan for Sustainable Arctic Development has passed onto a practical plane. Work is being carried out to fill it with concrete economic, social and environmental projects.

The National Action Plan of the Russian Federation to protect the marine environment from land-based pollution is being implemented. In conjunction with indigenous peoples' organizations a number of multilateral projects have been carried out to destroy persistent chemical pollutants.

The projects in the field of the health protection of the people living in the Arctic, including telemedicine and the creation of a specialized medical research center, have received support from Russia. Cooperation is growing stronger in the field of the

prevention and elimination of the consequences of technogenic disasters and control over the radiation situation.

A new - cultural - dimension has appeared in Council activities at Russia's initiative, with the emphasis laid on the preservation of the culture of the indigenous peoples precisely.

All in all, over 70 projects are under way at present. Russia is making its contribution to the holding of the International Polar Year.

The Russian Chairmanship has done everything necessary for the findings of a fundamental scientific document, the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment report, prepared by decision of the Council, to be taken due account of in the activities of all its six working groups. Basically important to us all are the questions of further monitoring of climate changes, the reduction of their consequences and adaptation to them.

We are sincerely grateful to the partners for their support in carrying out the Russian Chairmanship's priorities. Important in this regard was the contribution of all member states, participants and observers, associations of indigenous peoples and international organizations, scientists, entrepreneurs and noncommercial associations. That truly solidary approach is a guarantee of successful solution of the Arctic's problems.

Our special thanks goes to the leaders and experts of the working groups that developed and carried out in practice the Council's projects and programs.

Of course, not everything turned out the way we wanted. Transport infrastructure development, and the promotion of cooperation in the field of information and communication technologies in the Arctic merit heightened attention. The solution of the problems of financing project activities requires additional efforts.

We consider it important to preserve maximum concreteness in the Council's work, its focus on practical actions conducive to improving people's lives. In fact, it is to discuss this that we have gathered in Salekhard.

As an undertaking for the future, we have agreed to launch a new, energy, dimension of the Council. The aim is to ensure sustainable oil and gas production in the Arctic zone.

We see a considerable reserve in strengthening cooperation with the other organizations operating in the North. During the Russian Chairmanship, we have together with the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents EuroArctic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers defined the areas where the conjugation of efforts will yield an additional effect and make it possible to use the available resources more rationally. A concrete example of this is the Arctic Council-BEAC engagement in carrying out important environmental projects for us in the "hot spots" of the Russian part of the Barents region.

We also hope that the launch in 2007 of a renewed Northern Dimension policy, in which the Arctic Council is allotted the role of a key participant, will impart new dynamics to cooperation in the Arctic and the adjacent northern territories.

The Arctic today is a region of enormous opportunities. I mean both its inexhaustible natural wealth and the potential of the people living here. In the contemporary world opportunities, as a rule, go hand in hand with challenges. In our case this means the need for a comprehensive, systemic approach towards the economic development of the Arctic in combination with the solution of the tasks of preserving its unique natural environment in the interest of the present and future generations. The main mission of the Arctic Council is to work out and implement that approach in practice.

Thank you for your attention.

October 26, 2006