

Raipon Statement
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15 May 2013, Kiruna, Sweden
Arctic Council, Ministerial Meeting

*Dear Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen*

I am speaking for Raipon, which represents 40 indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation, who inhabit a huge territory from the West of the Kola Peninsula to Chukotka in the East.

Raipon would like to thank Sweden for its flawless chairmanship, partnership and courageous ambition in strengthening the role and significance of the Arctic Council.

Today the Arctic is a region of changes - political, strategic and innovative. Recognising the particular role of opening economic prospects and access to the natural resources and biological riches of the Arctic, the Arctic Council should develop a joint international regime for managing this area, while also recognising as a priority the right of indigenous peoples to traditional nature use, preservation of identity and way of life.

The Arctic, which is estimated to be the "planet's resource base of the 21st century", remains a territory of untouched nature and the living home of indigenous peoples.

Industrial development of the Arctic's resources should not disrupt the ecological balance, destroy the livelihoods of indigenous communities or hinder their development.

We recognise the growing pressure on our traditional territories (reindeer pastures, hunting and fishing areas, sacred places), due to widespread industrial expansion by Russian and international companies, which leads to the degradation of huge territories and the deterioration of the ecological situation, with all the ensuing social and cultural consequences for indigenous peoples.

Energy security is only valid when it is underpinned by ecological security and an advanced control system.

Today the creation of a comprehensive system to regulate the economic activities in the Arctic is of critical importance, as is the creation of a strategy to ensure the preservation and development of traditional culture in the face of climate change and industrial growth.

Indigenous peoples should play an integral role in the creation of such a strategy: from research to implementation, they should be the ones to make all decisions.

We welcome the Arctic Council's new observer states. But we call upon Ministers and the Arctic Council to fully take into account the opinions of the Permanent members

in this matter and we also call upon the observers to seriously and consistently work with indigenous peoples and to respect their rights.

Raipon applauds the establishment of the Permanent Secretariat in Tromsø, which will strengthen the work of the Arctic Council as a whole.

The Working Groups of the Arctic Council have done and continue to do great analytical, expert and practical work on critical areas affecting the interests of all inhabitants of the circumpolar region. Raipon calls upon the Working Groups to more actively engage Permanent members when implementing projects and to strengthen their institutional potential.

We continue to believe in the unique nature of the Arctic Council's work as an open forum for states and indigenous peoples, providing not only a comprehensive assessment of the processes occurring in the Arctic region, but also offering specific recommendations, measures and initiatives.

Raipon wishes Canada new aspirations and achievements in the second stage of the Arctic Council's development, and pledges to do its uttermost to contribute as much as possible to the work of the Arctic Council, focussing on sustainable development of the circumpolar region, its cultural variety and the well-being of all its inhabitants.