

Future Perspectives on the Arctic
William Graham, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Canada

Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Introduction

It is an honour to take part in today's discussion of the future of the Arctic. Only five years ago, when the Arctic Council had just been established, I had the honour of chairing a committee of the Canadian Parliament that examined Canada's relations with its Arctic neighbours. It became clear to us that the Arctic Council embodied the requisite principles to become the key institution in promoting cooperation among Arctic countries. In our final report we urged the Canadian government to spare no effort to "make the Arctic Council work". In the *Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy*, which was issued in 2000, we identified as an overarching objective the need to "establish the Circumpolar region as a vibrant geopolitical entity integrated into a rules-based international system" and we singled out the central role that Arctic Council must play in achieving this objective.

Today, the Council is beginning to come of age, thanks to the leadership exercised by its past chairs. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague Minister Erkki Tuomioja for the strong leadership demonstrated by Finland during its chairmanship over the past two years, and Ambassador Peter Stenlund for his outstanding work as Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials.

2. Demonstrating Leadership on the Environment

Cooperation in the Arctic began with concerns about the environment. The launch of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy, here in Finland in 1991, was a first milestone. The various reports on the Arctic environment prepared by Arctic Council Working Groups served as the spark for concrete joint action. However, we must remember that the most distinguishing feature of the region remains the indigenous peoples that have inhabited the Arctic for thousands of years and learned to survive and prosper in what appears to outsiders as an unforgivably harsh environment.

The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment has a particular importance. It is concerned not only with the possible impacts of climate change on the physical environment, but also on human health and livelihoods. These issues represent a key public policy concern for human and environmental security. The Assessment also marks an important change in approach. The Arctic Council's earlier work on contaminants depicted the North as a "victim" of problems originating in the South. However, increasing resource development and industrial activity in the North itself is also a source of the problems we are facing, and this increases the pressure on the Arctic environment. The impacts in the Arctic will be larger and more rapid than those experienced elsewhere. This is our incentive to develop the capacity of local peoples, particularly our children and youth, to define new solutions to emerging problems. We need to change our attitude to become a "global leader in sustainable development and governance".

Among Arctic States, Russia faces issues that are particularly acute and immediate. We must support the Russian government's efforts to address the legacy of industrial activity in the Arctic and its impacts on the survival of Indigenous peoples. We need to focus collectively on Russia in terms of environmental remediation, cleaner and more efficient industrial processes, and greater participation in the global market. At the Kananaskis Summit, G-8 Leaders launched a Global Partnership against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction, to address non-proliferation and related concerns, initially in Russia, including nuclear submarine dismantlement. I urge you to also support this initiative which complements the environmental work undertaken in the Arctic Council.

3. Sustainable Development

I would like to express Canada's full support for the priorities which my colleague the Foreign Minister of Iceland has set out in his opening remarks. We will support Iceland in the preparation of the Arctic Human Development Report and we welcome your intention of bringing attention to the issue of information technology in the Arctic. Long-distance provision of health and education services are a necessity in the vast expanses of the North.

The focus on the human dimensions also means that the work of the Arctic Council's Sustainable Development Working Group will take on added importance over the coming years. This is something that Canada supports strongly and that we see as an evolution of the Arctic Council's focus on sustainable development. Indeed, the World Summit on Sustainable Development that recently took place in South Africa has created a unique opportunity by giving global exposure to the Arctic while emphasising the socio-economic aspects of sustainable development. We should now promote more vigorously the Arctic Council as a unique model that brings together states, Permanent Participants and civil society to achieve constructive solutions that address human and environmental security.

In this context, it is timely for the Sustainable Development Working Group to develop its own internal expertise. For that, it requires a dedicated secretariat and staff. I am pleased to announce officially that Canada will establish this secretariat and provide half of the funding required.

4. Conclusion

More than ever, the Arctic has become a key region in the world and serves as a global indicator of human and environmental health. The current challenges in the Arctic should encourage us to establish flexible mechanisms of governance that can respond to rapid change both locally and internationally. These challenges will also encourage governments and Indigenous peoples to work together in a manner that provides mutual respect and cooperation. I want to assure you of Canada's unwavering support for the Arctic Council and of our wish to see cooperation among Arctic States grow by leaps and bounds, in order to see the Arctic become "Master of its own destiny".

Thank you.