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The Arctic Council is a high-level intergovernmental forum for addressing common concerns and challenges faced by the Arctic states: Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and Faeroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States, as well as by their indigenous peoples.

For the short period of time - in 2006 the Council will only celebrate its 10th anniversary – it has demonstrated a wide range of achievements for the benefit of Arctic residents, especially indigenous peoples. As far as the Arctic region is concerned it is the main mechanism for implementing the principles of sustainable development set forth in the Program of Action on the Implementation of the Agenda 21 adopted by the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 in Rio-de-Janeiro and the decisions taken by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 in Johannesburg.

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The Council is a unique venue for co-operation between national governments and indigenous peoples. Six organizations representing Arctic indigenous peoples - Aleut International Association (AIA), Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC), Gwich’in Council International (GCI), Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) and Saami Council (SC) - have the status of permanent participants of the Arctic Council, which is actually equal to member states. Permanent Participants are making an indispensable contribution to every aspect of the Council’s work. Russian AC Chairmanship has co-operation with indigenous
peoples among its priorities and pays special attention to development of their living conditions.

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The Arctic Council boasts an impressive array of observers: countries with a special interest in the Arctic (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom and Spain as ad hoc Observer until the Ministerial Session (October, 2006), international organizations, such as Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (CPAR), International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO), North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO), UN Economic Commission for Europe (UN-ECE), UN Environment Program (UNEP) as well as UN Development Program (UNDP).

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Observers of the Arctic Council also include a number of non-governmental organizations, such as Advisory Commission on Protection of the Seas (ACOPS), Arctic Circumpolar Route (ACR), Association of World Reindeer Herders (AWRH), Circumpolar Conservation Union (CCU), International Arctic Science Committee (IASC), International Arctic Social Sciences Association (IASSA), International Union for Circumpolar Health (IUCH), International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Northern Forum, University of the Arctic (UArctic), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

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The Arctic Council was set up in 1996 on the basis of joint commitment of its member states to the well-being of the inhabitants of the Arctic including recognition of the special relationship and unique contributions to the Arctic of indigenous peoples and their communities; to sustainable development in the Arctic region including economic and social development, improved health
conditions and cultural well-being; as well as commitment to the protection of the Arctic environment, including health of Arctic ecosystems, maintenance of biodiversity in the Arctic region and conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

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Let me briefly outline the activities of the Arctic Council. The scientific work and policy guidance of the Council is carried out in five expert working groups focusing on such issues as monitoring, assessing and preventing pollution in the Arctic, climate change, biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, emergency preparedness and prevention as well as the living conditions of the Arctic residents.

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The Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP) conducts monitoring and assessment of pollution, human health and climate in the Arctic. This work is important in identifying pollution risks and their impact on Arctic ecosystems and in assessing the effectiveness of international agreements on pollution control, such as the Stockholm Convention.

The results of the AMAP monitoring and assessment work are dealt with by the Action Plan to Eliminate Pollution in the Arctic (ACAP). Its projects include work on cleaner production and control of obsolete pesticides and dioxins and most recently on new chemicals that are making their way to the Arctic food chain such as brominated flame retardants. The Action Plan also develops proposals for environmentally important investment projects, some together with the Nordic Environmental Finance Corporation (NEFCO).

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The working group on Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) aims at promoting the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of living recourses. There is a need for enhanced monitoring of biodiversity at the
circumpolar level, fully utilizing traditional knowledge, to detect the impacts of global change on biodiversity and to enable Arctic communities to effectively respond and adapt to those changes. CAFF’s new Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Program (CBMP) was launched in Cambridge, UK, September 6-9, 2005 in conjunction with the CAFF Management Board Meeting. A suite of 12 indicator areas to be monitored has been selected and data management strategy has been developed. Remote sensing and community-based monitoring task teams have been established.

The Program is well on its way in cooperation with UNEP-World conservation monitoring center, Microsoft Research and strong international support from scientists, majoring in biodiversity in the Arctic. CBMP is also submitted as an International Polar Year project to the International Program Office. It has been proposed that CBMP produce a 2010 Arctic Biodiversity Assessment. CAFF is going to submit this for consideration by the SAOs and Ministers at the 2006 Ministerial.

Other areas of CAFF’s activity include the Flora Expert Group, the Seabird Expert Group and Circumpolar Protected Areas Network.

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Expanded use of natural resources and growth in tourism call for new efforts to enhance the security of marine transport, prevent emergencies or respond to them effectively, including smooth cross-border assistance among neighboring states. **The Emergency, Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR) Working Group** deals with these issues and has, among other things, prepared a Circumpolar map of Resources at Risk from Oil Spills in the Arctic. Recently EPPR added to its mandate responding to natural disasters. Significant work is carried out in the field of flood monitoring in Northern rivers. We hope, that in the course of the Russian chairmanship of the Arctic Council a broad
intergovernmental agreement can be concluded among Arctic Council Member-
states on cooperation in the area of emergencies, the so-called Arctic Rescue.

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The **working Group on the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME)** has elaborated the Arctic Council strategic plan for the protection of the Arctic marine environment which deals with climate changes and developmental pressures on the Arctic marine environment from shipping, damping, offshore oil and gas exploration and development and land-based activities. Now the major task of this program is preparation of the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA). A deliverable to the AC Ministerial in 2006 would be a snapshot of current Arctic marine shipping, ice conditions and risk assessment, whereas a “final product” (including assessment of environmental and social impacts and recommendations) of AMSA is supposed to be delivered to the AC Ministerial in 2008.

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The **Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG)** is dealing through its various projects with the economic, social and cultural aspects of sustainable development.

Overall sixteen projects have been or are being implemented. This Working Group had overseen the preparation of the Arctic Human Development Report, which was delivered to our Ministerial meeting in November 2004. The report represents the first comprehensive attempt to document and compare systematically the welfare of Arctic residents on a circumpolar basis. The report provides an information base and a means to identify areas for future work. There are obvious gaps in our knowledge of human development in the circumpolar region. The report should help identify those gaps and suggest specific areas that deserve more attention. Other current projects of SDWG are: Women’s participation in Resource Management (Norway), Survey of living conditions in
the Arctic (Denmark/Greenland), Product development and processing in sustainable reindeer husbandry (Finland), Future of children and youth in the Arctic (Canada), Circumpolar Infrastructure Task Force (USA), Ecological and cultural tourism (Finland, USA), Telemedicine (USA), Economy of the North – ECONOR (Norway).

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Of particular importance is the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA). The report was commissioned by the Arctic Council ministerial meeting at Barrow in October 2000 in order to evaluate and synthesize knowledge on climate variability and change and increased ultraviolet radiation, and support policy-making processes and the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The ministers requested that the assessment address environmental, human health, social, cultural and economic impacts and consequences, including policy recommendations.

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A team of more than 300 leading Arctic researchers, indigenous representatives and other experts from fifteen nations participated in the work on the ACIA. They have distilled and synthesized available scientific information, traditional knowledge, and indigenous perceptions in order to examine how climate and ultraviolet radiation have changed in the Arctic, how they are projected to change in the future, and what the consequences of these changes will be for the Arctic and the world.

Delivered to the ministers of the Arctic Council Member States in November 2004 the ACIA provided the foundation for a broad range of policy recommendations in the field of climate change pertaining to mitigation, adaptation, as well as research, observations, monitoring, modeling and outreach.

In order to decide on the ACIA follow-up activities, the Arctic Council has established a “focal point“ comprised of the Chairs of the Arctic Council’s
Working Groups, the Chairman of SAOs and one representative of the Permanent Participants.

The “focal point” will report the progress made to the upcoming SAO meeting and deliver its recommendations at the 2006 Ministerial Meeting. The “focal point” is cooperating closely with IASC and other relevant actors to ensure that proposals for ACIA follow-up by the Arctic Council Working Groups are coordinated and harmonized with activities outside of the Arctic Council.

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Of major significance for the Arctic community is the International Polar Year (IPY), which will start April 1, 2007. The Arctic Council is willing to provide its political support for the IPY and to participate actively in the education and outreach activities of the IPY. The Arctic Council has contributed to the IPY planning process through the input of its working groups. The contribution emphasized, in particular, the importance of including a human dimension in the IPY and of climate change in the context of the IPY. As an example of the participation of the states in the IPY, I can mention that Russia alone is going to launch.

The Arctic Council launched three multilateral initiatives as a contribution to the IPY, the ”Arctic Human Health Initiative”, AHHI, initially led by the United States, ”Coordination of Observation and Monitoring in the Arctic for Assessment and Research”, COMAAR, initially led by Sweden and Joint atmospheric Climate Observatory in Tiksi – the city in the North of the Russian Federation, initiated by Russia. We expect to have close cooperation with the IPY Joint Committee, where the Arctic Council has an Observer status.

I have mentioned only some initiatives of the Arctic Council, but total number of the projects is over 70.
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We in the Arctic Council also pay special attention to our relations with the parliamentarians of the Arctic region. We regularly attend meetings of the Conference of the Parliamentarians of the Arctic region and of its Standing Committee. We fully support all steps to enhance the parliamentary dimension of Arctic cooperation, which the Parliamentarians themselves would find appropriate.