PROGRAM OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION CHAIRMANSHIP
OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL IN 2004-2006

The Arctic Council is a unique forum for interaction between the governments of the Arctic States, the Permanent Participants representing the indigenous peoples living in the spacious Arctic region and a number of countries and international organizations enjoying an observer status at the Arctic Council. During a short period of time - in 2006 the Arctic Council will only celebrate its 10th anniversary - marked by vigorous activities and concrete deeds the Arctic Council has demonstrated that 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.

Due to historic reasons the environmental component still prevails in the activities of the Arctic Council which has emerged from the international cooperation in the framework of the Arctic Environment Protection Strategy of 1991. However, recently the scope of the Arctic Council priority activities, alongside with its environmental objectives, has expanded to include other issues of social and economic development, in particular in such areas as the use of information and communication technologies, telemedicine, education. Yet, it is obviously true that the social dimension and especially the economic line of the Arctic cooperation still lag behind in the Arctic Council activities compared to the environmental component. There is a need for further steps to be taken to ensure a more balanced contribution of the Arctic Council to resolving the problems of sustainable development of the Arctic region. The Russian Federation considers the attainment of this objective while further developing the environmental programs
of the Arctic Council to be an important element of its mission at the Chair of the Arctic Council.

Arctic Council’s Sustainable Development Action Plan

The beginning of realization of the Arctic Council's Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP) under a general leadership of the Senior Arctic Officials is viewed by Russia as a major priority during its Chairmanship. We expect that the SDAP shall contribute to effective coordination of work of all Arctic Council structures aimed at building up capacity in the three sustainable development areas - the economic, the social and the environmental one.

The Russian Chairmanship of the Arctic Council itself entailing its Chairmanship of the Sustainable Development Working Group is considered by Russia as a factor of additional responsibility. Our success will be measured primarily by the extent to which the Arctic Council Member States manage to translate the SDAP into practical activities, specific projects in each area of sustainable development, and to attract resources, first of all financial ones, needed for its realization.

In order to implement the SDAP the Russian Chairmanship of the Arctic Council intends to focus on issues of developing the circumpolar transport infrastructure. In this context it is necessary to further consider the issues related to the use of the Northern Sea Route for the purpose of international Arctic shipping including transcontinental transport of goods, development of its structure, creation of favorable economic and legal conditions for transit, organization of three or four pilot transit trips of Russian and foreign ice ships. The goal is to form in the future the national Russian transport water way - the Northern Sea Route - as a Euro-Asian sea transport corridor integrated into the world transport system.

The issue of developing air transport in the Arctic including prospects of using cross-polar routes deserves further consideration as well.
We believe it important that the Arctic Council activities continue to be focused on enhancing cooperation in the field of information and communication technology including further practical steps to develop the Arctic Information and Communication Technology Network.

The Russian Chairmanship also intends to promote projects in the following fields:

- protection of health of the people residing and working in the Arctic including telemedicine and prevention of socially significant diseases specific to the polar latitudes;
- development of social infrastructure including improvement of the artificial habitat under the global climate change;
- sustainable management of natural resources and wider use of renewable sources of energy.

We expect that the International St. Petersburg Economic Forum with its main theme of the year 2005 being the development of cooperation in the North will facilitate shaping the economic component of the Sustainable Development Action Plan, developing related projects, as well as enabling new lines of economic cooperation in the Arctic as a whole.

Due attention will be given by the Russian Chairmanship to enhanced collaboration in the field of education and science and to the implementation of the Declaration of the Meeting of Ministers of Education and Science of the Arctic Council Member States in Reykjavik on June 9, 2004.

Cooperation in the field of environmental protection

Enhancing international cooperation in the field of environmental protection is a key priority of Russia's foreign policy. A major evidence of this is the ratification by the Russian Federation of the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework
Convention on Climate Change, which cleared the way to the entry into force of that instrument.

Main priorities of the Russian Chairmanship of the Arctic Council include implementation of further coordinated measures to protect, preserve and restore the Arctic environment, enhance environmental security, including prevention of ecological emergencies, as well as to provide for the rational Arctic resource management in order to ensure environmental, social and economic welfare of the present and future generations in that region.

The Russian Chairmanship intends to pursue the policy aimed at intensifying efforts taken by the Arctic Council Member States within the framework of the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP) and the Arctic Council Action Plan to Eliminate Pollution of the Arctic, which are aimed at preventing and reducing anthropogenic pollution in the Arctic, including identification and removal of ecological "hot spots" in the Arctic region. In this context the Chairmanship considers it important to develop interaction between respective working structures of the Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council.

The Chairmanship will pay increased attention to the preparation of the AMAP's Oil and Gas Assessment - one of main documents for the 2006 Ministerial session of the Arctic Council. In this connection, the Chairmanship attaches great importance to the preparation and holding in Russia in 2005 of an international symposium on prospects for and consequences of the exploration and development of oil and gas resources in the Arctic.

Among priorities of the Russian Chairmanship are the issues related to the preservation and restoration of natural biological diversity, protection of biological species and their habitat, preservation of natural heritage objects, development of a network of natural areas of preferential protection in the Arctic.
The Chairmanship will pay due attention to the issues concerning protection of the Arctic marine environment, particularly to the international and national implementation of the Arctic Marine Strategic Plan for the Protection of the Environment, worked out by the Arctic Council's Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment Working Group.

Beginning of activities in the Russian Federation to execute its National Plan of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Anthropogenic Pollution in the Arctic Region of the Russian Federation (NPA-Arctic) and the project of the Global Environment Facility to support this Plan will represent an important contribution of the Chairmanship to the implementation by the Arctic Council of the Regional Program of Action for the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment from Landbased Activities. The Russian Chairmanship counts on an active participation of the Arctic Council Member States and other international and regional organizations in the Partners' Conference to support NPA-Arctic.

Cooperation in the field of prevention and management of emergencies

Priorities of the Russian Chairmanship include strengthening the Arctic cooperation in the field of prevention and management of emergencies in the Arctic region. In this context we consider it important that together with the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council the Russian Federation assumes the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council's Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group, as well as the functions of its Secretariat.

The Russian Chairmanship intends, in particular, to concentrate its efforts on developing a mechanism for monitoring, prevention and management of emergencies in the Arctic region, i.a. on the basis of provisions of the "Arctic Rescue" initiative of the Russian Federation.

An international conference to work out a mechanism for monitoring, prevention and management of emergencies in the Arctic which, according to the
plans of the Chairmanship, will be held in Russia in 2005 should become an important component of these activities. In the longer term we could consider the signing of an intergovernmental agreement on cooperation between rescue services of the Arctic Council Member States in this area.

Sustainable development of the Arctic indigenous peoples

Creation of conditions for sustainable development of the Arctic indigenous peoples is the field of particular attention and responsibility of the Russian Chairmanship. The Arctic Council activities in economic, social and environmental areas should fully correspond to the needs of the Arctic indigenous peoples, ensuring their access to all benefits of civilization, high quality social, health, transport and educational services. In this context the Arctic University plays a special role. It is important also to continue the work on the problem of environmental pollution impact on the Arctic indigenous peoples and their health.

The Chairmanship intends to focus its attention on the problems connected with the traditional lifestyle of indigenous peoples under the contemporary market conditions, preservation of their ethnic identity and cultural and historic heritage.

The Russian Federation proceeds from the fact that a meeting of ministers of culture of the Arctic Council Member States that could be held during the Russian Chairmanship and devoted to the problems of preserving of unique and original culture of the Arctic indigenous peoples would be an important component of these activities.

International Polar Year

The attention of the Chairmanship will be persistently focused on the activities of the Arctic Council and its working bodies aimed at developing the Arctic Council contribution to the implementation in 2007-2008 of the Third International Polar Year proposed by the Russian Federation.
Taking into account the global importance of environmental change and its consequences in the polar regions, as well as the necessity to develop forecasting systems for processes in the polar latitudes of the planet, and the vulnerability of polar ecosystems to anthropogenic impacts, the Russian Chairmanship believes that the basic elements of activities in this area are research of the current and evaluation of the future climate change in the polar regions, identification of anthropogenic and natural environmental condition changes, their impact on the polar regions ecosystems, evaluation of the social and economic consequences of changes in the environmental condition in the polar regions.

In practical terms the attention is supposed to be particularly focused on ensuring an efficient participation of the Arctic Council in the development of strategic scientific and implementation plans to be carried out within the frameworks of the International Polar Year.

The Russian Federation considers as one of the important prerequisites to the Arctic Council efficient work the further strengthening of the Arctic Council interaction with other international and regional organizations which contribute to sustainable development of the Arctic region, with the scientific community and the Conference of the Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region.

The Russian Chairmanship of the Arctic Council expects that all Member States, Permanent Participants and Observers at the Arctic Council would support the implementation of the program of the Russian Federation Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2004-2006 in the common interests of progressive development of the international Arctic cooperation.