

Gwich'in Council

INTERNATIONAL



On behalf of the Gwich'in Council International, I would like to welcome you to our traditional territory, which is just to the north of where we sit. Fairbanks has traditionally been a meeting place of different Dene' peoples and we are honoured that it is able to play this role for the Arctic Council as we celebrate its twentieth anniversary.

Thank you also to Chief Trimbleton-Gilbert, a member of our nation for the words of welcome and to the performers for showing everyone that our culture is very much alive.

Leaders among the Gwich'in nation serve in many capacities - on our tribal councils, in our village corporations, and as leaders of our land claims organizations. We are intimately aware of the need for social and economic development in our communities and with the associated challenges.

We must have the right to determine our own balance between safeguarding the Arctic environment and our participation in the modern resource economy. The balance between jobs and the environment is one that is always at the forefront of our communities.

However, we strongly believe that without significant, sustained, and coordinated approaches to addressing the causes of the warming Arctic climate, our culture - linked so closely to the Porcupine Caribou Herd - cannot survive.

The Arctic environment has sustained Gwich'in since time immemorial and now Gwich'in must use new ways to stand up and protect it, so that it can continue to sustain future generations.

It is for this reason, that Gwich'in need the Arctic Council to continue to show leadership; not only through the ground-breaking projects of the Working Groups, but at the highest political levels, as well.

We appreciate the support of those around the table, who continue to be allies with us, not only through their efforts to address climate change both within and outside the Arctic, but also in the advancement of our Indigenous rights.

We look forward to working with the incoming Finnish chairmanship over the next two years and in particular welcome their initiative on Best Practises in Environmental Impact Assessment. EIAs are an important tool for evaluating this balance that needs to be struck between protecting the environment and facilitating economic development.

Mahsi.