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SDWG STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK –
Part One: Strategic Vision
1. Context

The Arctic region is characterized by cultural diversity, differing socio-economic conditions, and unique climates as well as variable degrees of remoteness. Furthermore, the Arctic is experiencing environmental and climate change faster than any other part of the planet, creating both challenges and opportunities. To promote the sustainable development in this unique region, all Arctic States, Indigenous peoples, societies, and other stakeholders must act in a collaborative partnership that also draws on the regional and global efforts already underway.

Sustainable development for the Arctic region has been at the core of the Arctic Council since its establishment. The founding Ottawa Declaration (1996) commits the Arctic States “to sustainable development in the Arctic region, including economic and social development, improved health conditions and cultural well-being” and “to the protection of the Arctic environment, including the health of Arctic ecosystems, maintenance of biodiversity in the Arctic region and conservation and sustainable use of natural resources”.

Expanding on this mandate, the Arctic Council developed the Arctic Council Terms of Reference for a Sustainable Development Program (1998) and established the SDWG at the Arctic Council Ministerial in Iqaluit in September, 1998. Through the concrete projects and activities of the SDWG, cross-cutting efforts with other Working Groups, and updated strategic frameworks such as the Barrow Sustainable Development Framework Document (2000), the Arctic Council has continuously built on its core objective of achieving sustainable development for the Arctic region.

In keeping with this objective, the SDWG is mandated to propose and adopt steps to be taken by the Arctic States to advance sustainable development in the Arctic. This includes pursuing opportunities to protect and enhance the environment and the economies, culture and health of Indigenous communities and of other inhabitants of the Arctic, as well as to improve the environmental, economic and social conditions of Arctic communities as a whole.

Building self-sufficient, resilient, and healthy Arctic communities for present and future generations, while protecting the environment and means of subsistence and creating conditions for the preservation and development of cultural traditions, will continue to be a primary goal of the SDWG. The SDWG focuses on initiatives that provide practical knowledge and contribute to capacity building of Indigenous peoples and Arctic communities to respond to local, regional and global challenges and opportunities.

2. Vision

The SDWG strives to be a leading force for sustainable development in the Arctic. Through its regional leadership, it contributes to global sustainable development efforts such as the UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and to climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts such as the Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (2015). The adoption of Agenda 2030 in particular provides new momentum to enhance sustainable development activities relevant to the Arctic and resonates with the past, present and future work of the SDWG.

Sustainable development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. As such, this principle calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for people and the planet.
For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonize three core elements or pillars in an integrated way: social equity, economic development and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected and are crucial for the well-being of individuals and societies. In addition to being at the center of the work of the SDWG, sustainable development is also a cross-cutting concept that runs through the work of the Arctic Council, its working groups and task forces.

Sustainable development must be based on best available knowledge, which includes knowledge derived from scientific data, Indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge and local knowledge. Through innovative approaches, the SDWG will contribute to an Arctic with expanded economic activities capable of producing wealth for the people who make the region their home now and in the future, while supporting their well-being, promoting their cultures, and safeguarding their environment.

The SDWG is committed to engaging its experts and stakeholders, and to making best use of its project resources, so as to promote sustainable development in the Arctic.

The SDWG, by focusing on the human dimension in the Arctic Council, will promote the vibrancy of the region’s peoples, cultures, and values and strengthen the resilience, capacity and well-being of the Arctic’s richest resource, its people - in particular the Indigenous peoples who have lived in the Arctic since time immemorial, and the youth of the region.

The vision extends to 2030, a period which coincides with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This provides a unique opportunity for the SDWG to contribute to the implementation of the global sustainable development goals pertaining to the Arctic.