

# Statements from Rovaniemi 2018 Observer Special Session: Observer States

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Mr Chair:

I would like to thank the Finnish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council for offering the Observer States this opportunity to express our views to the Council's Members, Permanent Participants, and other Observers. Spain appreciates this gesture, and is confident that it will contribute to making the Arctic Council a more effective instrument for dialogue and cooperation, to the benefit of the region, and to all of us here today.

My country is a world leader in biodiversity: Spain is home to 49 UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, with more than 50,000 animal species and 10,000 plant species. We consider biodiversity a crucial element of ecosystem maintenance and sustainability, and have a longstanding public policy of defending it. This includes different national institutions that coordinate biodiversity studies, research, and maintenance.

We are fully aware of the reasons why biodiversity protection is a priority for the peoples of the Arctic, and their governments. Spain wants to join these efforts, supporting and contributing, as an Observer on the Arctic Council, the research on biodiversity in the region, so that our scientific experience can provide evidence-based policy-making as quickly as possible to guarantee the conservation of Arctic ecosystems and the benefits that they provide. This is true for the local communities that know them best, having lived on and cared for these lands since time immemorial.

Spain's research programming includes a number of initiatives focused on biodiversity. The Spanish members of IASC's Terrestrial Working Group are experts in plant diversity, and work actively in this field, in collaboration with other Arctic research groups.

As to animals, both the Spanish Institute of Oceanography, whose research mandate encompasses the marine environment, and the Spanish representatives in the AMBI programme, which researches Arctic migratory birds, are international leaders, collaborating very actively with experts from other countries.

I would like to put the spotlight here on Spain's participation in the BiodivERSA ERA-Net, a network of national and regional organizations that promote biodiversity research, which recently included a European project on terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity in Svalbard, Norway, centring on microbial diversity in those environments. Moreover, Spain has funded the work of many Spanish researchers on a wide range of biodiversity issues in Canada, such as major projects in the High Arctic, on Ward Hunt Island; the overwintering research programme of the icebreaker *Amundsen* at the Mackenzie River mouth; and the CHARS station.

These are examples of Spain's commitment to the study and protection of Arctic biodiversity, both by funding national projects, and by supporting the participation of Spanish researchers in European and other international initiatives, as well as participating in the Arctic Council's working groups.

Mr Chair, one issue that is especially concerning to the Spanish scientific community and to the authorities in charge of conservation policy, is the negative impact of invasive species on native diversity, both in Spain and in other especially fragile areas, such as the polar regions. Both the Arctic and the Antarctic are suffering major environmental stress due to climate change. This makes these ecosystems more vulnerable when faced with the arrival of non-native species. In the Arctic environment, some of these species can become invasive,

potentially having a dramatic impact on local diversity, and generating disturbances to the ecosystems, and consequently, to local populations.

Especially troubling is the arrival of insects that to date have never thrived in the Arctic and could be potential disease vectors, or freshwater microorganisms that could cause problems in water sources, endangering public health in Arctic communities.

Spain believes it is essential to carry out active monitoring of native biodiversity, establishing and maintaining observatories in Arctic regions, with the participation of local residents. This would make it possible to detect the presence and settlement of these invasive species, enabling officials to take action quickly. The monitoring being suggested here encompasses the terrestrial, riverine, and marine environments, as well as microbial levels and native animal and plant species. This is why Spain is offering to collaborate with the Arctic Invasive Alien Species (ARIAS) programme, which CAFF and some Arctic states have already launched. Based on our own experience as a European country closely connected to Africa, Spain would be able to contribute a great deal of know-how in this field, including lessons learned from our own experiences with invasive species.

What I have just said is borne out by Spain's active participation in SAON: we are convinced that Arctic-wide observation is essential. And not only, of course, for physical variables, but also, as I've said before, to check on biological diversity, since this is a sensitive and potentially telling indicator of changes in the ecosystem.

Mr Chair, Spain would also like to express its concern regarding the effects of global pollution on the Arctic. One especially striking example is the presence of microplastics at different Arctic sites. Spain is carrying out different research projects on this issue, both in the Arctic and the Antarctic, focusing especially on the impact on polar biodiversity of microplastics, which serve as a vehicle for invasive species and disrupt the local biota.

Spain has been doing its homework in this area. For example, the Spanish Polar Committee is disseminating information on the Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Program CBMP amongst members of Spain's scientific community, encouraging them to participate in its different projects.

Finally, Mr Chair, all of these facts, and the objectives that we are discussing here, are part of something much larger: the 2030 Agenda, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals that the international community has set for ourselves. Together with Spain's national efforts to make these goals a reality, we would like to contribute, as Observers on the Arctic Council, to the joint efforts being led by the Council, its Member States, and its Permanent Participants to benefit the region.

Thank you very much.