

Statements from Rovaniemi 2018 Observer Special Session: Observer States

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Arctic Council Secretariat

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SAO plenary meeting

University of Lapland, Agora Hall, Rovaniemi, Finland

1-2 November 2018

Observer Special Session: Biodiversity in the Arctic

Statement Switzerland

Ambassador Stefan Estermann
Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
Switzerland

Dear Chair of the Arctic Council,

Dear Observers,

Dear Friends

My name is Stefan Estermann, and I am the new Swiss Ambassador for Arctic activities. I would like to thank you for organizing this Observer special session and for allowing us to share with you our activities supporting the goals of the Arctic Council regarding biodiversity.

Wildlife is often used to symbolize a region. The polar bear is a true icon of the Arctic - The word Arctic comes from the Greek word *arktikos*, "near the Bear, northern" - , while the Arctic fox is part of the Arctic Council logo. In the high altitudes of the Alps, the Alpine ibex (a species of wild goat) is the emblematic animal of the mountains.

But above all, biodiversity is the basis of our existence. It is our responsibility for ethical and moral reasons to maintain species, gene and habitat diversity. It is only thanks to high biodiversity that ecosystems can render vital services and values to people (like clean water and stable soil).

With climate change facing us today and even more so in the future, the role of polar science in providing critical knowledge for these sensitive regions will grow, and the Swiss science community is committed to continue to make important contributions to this field.

Let me give you two examples of domains in which Swiss researchers are particularly involved in the Arctic context:

- We are taking part in the International Tundra Experiment ITEX. We do so both as participants in the global data analysis and with our experimental site in Switzerland. We also send researchers to ITEX sites in other countries. In this large project, research teams are performing long-term experiments in the Arctic, Antarctic and Alpine habitats at over 40 sites worldwide.
- Vegetation changes are a problem across the whole Arctic. Swiss researchers are also involved in a global change and biodiversity research project in the Siberian Tundra, which aims to understand how the predicted increase in summer rain affects tundra ecosystems and how the changing vegetation in turn affects permafrost thawing and climate through energy and carbon fluxes.

These two examples highlight the increasing contributions to experimental and observational research of Tundra ecosystem changes by Swiss researchers. But we have a much higher potential to contribute to Arctic biodiversity research, including modelling of species distribution and ecosystem functioning to support climate predictions, but also conservation and adaptation policies.

I am also happy that since this year, a Swiss researcher is participating in the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) biodiversity working group of the Arctic Council.

Dear Friends of the Arctic

Switzerland would like to continue its commitment to the area of biodiversity to ensure that the various biodiversity-related agreements are effectively implemented. This involves strengthening synergies and ensuring the coherent design of the implementation of the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** and its international instruments and finance mechanism.

Thank you for your attention.