

Statement by Ms. Sally Swetzof, AIA Board Vice President

At the Eleventh Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council

Rovaniemi

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On behalf of everyone at the Aleut International Association, we would like to thank Finland for two years of leadership. We recognize the many projects and initiatives that were completed under the Finnish leadership and we would like to commend the staff of the Arctic Council Secretariat, Indigenous People Secretariat and especially Aleksi Härkönen.

We have a unique relationship with our environment. Subsistence as well as commercial activities together sustain our way of life. We are an integral part of the ecosystem in which we live. The Unanga{ (Aleut) people have been experiencing accelerated climate change in our region. We see this with warmer temperatures, earlier fish runs and stormier weather. This is important to note because it also shifts how we as Unangax people can continue to practice our culture.

It is with these things in mind that we have been active in pursuing projects that compliment efforts to document and plan for these changes. The CAFF approved CONAS project that is focused on subsistence mapping is one example of how we are working at the ground level to help our Arctic communities to build tools that they can use to influence policy which sustains our communities and resources for the future. It also allows for partnership building and dialogue to happen, this strengthens our relationships and helps us to carry out our mission of “promoting continuity of culture and protecting the resources needed to sustain it”.

With that being said, the work of the Arctic Council is very important to the Unanga{ (Aleut) people of the United States and the Russian Federation. Our well being and our culture is tied to the health of the marine environment, as it always had been. Safe shipping, healthy biodiversity, and an understanding of what to expect from a changing climate are essential to continuing our way of life.

The significant progress made on the utilization of Indigenous Knowledge in the Arctic Council has been encouraging and we hope to continue to see this in the future. It makes a world of difference when we bring information about these projects back to the Unanga{ (Aleut) people and they see that science is addressing indigenous people’s issues and recognizes their relationship with the environment and how their knowledge contributes to conservation efforts.

One highlight of this two-year Chairmanship was the hosting of an Arctic Council Working Group meeting in our region of Alaska. We would like to thank the US Chairmanship of the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group for bringing the esteemed CAFF board to Unalaska in September 2018. We are happy that others have gotten to see our beautiful home

in Alaska, and meet some of our Unanga{ (Aleut) people. Unalaska offers a glimpse into the rich history ad culture of our people and it also offers a view of the significant presence of the commercial fishing and shipping industry that sustains the community economically. It is a true example of how culture and commercial activities work together and build our communities.

The Aleutians are the gateway to the Arctic and our people have thrived in this area for millennia. We appreciate the opportunity to be here at this table with many distinguished ministers, colleagues and friends. We look forward to the Icelandic Chairmanship and participating in the continued work of the Arctic Council.

Qagaasakuq! (Thank you!)