

AAC Statement for the MMIS12_2021

Chief Bill Erasmus

AAC International Chair

Thank you for this opportunity to present to you today on this special occasion. 2021 marks the 25th Anniversary of the Arctic Council and it signifies the need to celebrate this event. For 25 years, Arctic States and Permanent Participants have worked closely together to chart the path of the Arctic. The Arctic Council has matured into a relevant forum, that is taken seriously on a global basis. As Permanent Participants, we have focused on bringing our Indigenous Knowledge with western science, to provide for the best outcomes in the Arctic. Our Indigenous Knowledge teaches us to work with all peoples, and to plan far into the future with a need to pass on the skills and abilities to our future generations.

With our limited capacity to participate in all the Working Groups we have prioritized and focused on specific areas. The SDWG has been our priority. We are grateful for the Icelandic Chairmanship's role in finalizing the gender equality report. It is far reaching and will assist us moving forward. We are pleased, that the Covid-19 work was coordinated, and the Arctic Athabaskan Council will continue to participate and engage in this important work. Our communities are especially vulnerable because of the isolation and remoteness. Our overcrowded housing conditions and lack of infrastructure affected us and made it especially difficult during Covid-19 and we are pleased that work was done in this area, and we will continue to participate in that. We are also pleased, that the Arctic Resilience Forum (ARF) was a focus for SDWG. It allowed us to highlight the many issues, that are before us.

The Arctic Athabaskan Council is pleased that we were able to work diligently on the 10-year Strategic Plan and the Ministerial Declaration. It allows us to collectively look ahead, and plan in an organized way. We are especially pleased that we included the support of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) into these two documents. We also agreed to capitalize Indigenous Peoples in the documents and will continue this as an ongoing practice in the Arctic Council. That is a progress.

We are especially concerned about the climate crisis that affects us globally. It is obvious with the forest fires, flooding, melting permafrost and ice, and the low number of caribou to rely on for sustenance. We want to thank the Icelandic Chair for an excellent Chairmanship during the difficult times during an epidemic, and we also welcome Russia as a new Chair, and look forward to much success going forward.

Thank you, Mahsi Cho.