

# Secretary Antony J. Blinken Intervention at Arctic Council Ministerial

REMARKS

[ANTONY J. BLINKEN, SECRETARY OF STATE](#)

HARPA CONCERT HALL AND CONFERENCE CENTER

REYKJAVIK, ICELAND

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**SECRETARY BLINKEN:** Well, thank you very much, and I recognize that we're the only thing standing between us and the signing ceremony, so we'll try to be brief.

Foreign ministers, permanent participant heads of delegation, working group representatives, Arctic Council observers and guests, it really is an honor to join you for this meeting of the Arctic Council. And I'm especially pleased to be here today with Senator Lisa Murkowski from Alaska, a longstanding leader and expert on Arctic issues.

Gudlaugur, thank you so much for your incredibly warm hospitality, and to you and to Iceland for remarkably strong and effective leadership of the council during your chairmanship despite, as everyone has noted, the hardships of COVID-19.

The breadth and depth of the work that's been completed during Iceland's chairmanship is simply remarkable. I think it exemplifies the best of our governments, our scientists, our communities. Iceland deserves a great deal of credit for leaving the Arctic Council stronger than they found it. Thank you.

Now, the United States welcomes Russia's chairmanship of the council. We look forward to implementing the council's first-ever strategic plan in cooperation with Russia and all of our partners. It's fitting that we would adopt this 10-year plan for the council's 25th anniversary. It represents an important step forward in ensuring that the council becomes even more effective and cooperative for the future.

And I do want to echo what several of my fellow ministers have already said. We're committed to advancing a peaceful Arctic region where cooperation prevails on climate, the environment, science and safety, and where sustainable economic development benefits the people of the region themselves.

This council is indispensable to this vision. This is the preeminent forum for the eight Arctic states and six permanent participants to cooperate and address shared priorities together. Let me quickly just mention a few of the priorities from our perspective.

One is effective governance and the rule of law to ensure that the Arctic remains a region free of conflict, where countries act responsibly. Another is stopping COVID-19 and making sure that we're better prepared for future global health emergencies. The council has analyzed the health, economic, and social impacts of COVID-19 on Arctic communities and reinforced our understanding of what communities need to respond effectively to the pandemic.

Another priority, of course, that everyone has touched on, and it's a focus of our work, is the climate crisis. The Arctic, as others have noted, is warming at three times the global average, which adds even greater urgency to our efforts. Reducing emissions of black carbon and methane is particularly important. I'm proud that the most recent report on the United States black carbon emissions was 34 percent below 2013 levels, the largest reported black carbon reduction by any Arctic state. And we're grateful to the council for being on the leading edge of assessing and reporting impacts of climate change in the Arctic.

In addition to climate, we need to protect the environment of the Arctic. And on that front, I want to applaud the work of the council's six working groups and one expert group, which has increased the council's preparedness to handle the risks that come with increased human activity in the region. The United States intends to provide up to a million dollars to support the council's climate environmental protection work, and we'll work with and notify Congress of our intent.

Additionally, under Iceland's leadership, the council has increased its work on marine litter and plastic pollution, as others have noted. It's conducted exercises to prepare for possible oil spills and search and rescue events, signed a statement of cooperation with the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, and the U.S. Coast Guard is a proud partner in that work. And the council has increased its focus on wildland fires, which are one of the most significant early impacts of climate change in the Arctic.

There are now projects underway across multiple working groups, and critically, indigenous knowledge is being incorporated. That's vital. Indigenous peoples have generations worth of knowledge about how to be good stewards of the Arctic. We must be true and equal partners in this work. And we have to bring the same partnership to bear in pursuing economic development in a sustainable and transparent way that directly benefits indigenous communities. That's the core test of this council. I'm confident that we can meet it together.

Let's take a step back for just a moment. The council has proven itself to be responsive and adaptable, to make good use of expertise, to be partners to indigenous leaders and communities. Our cooperation has become stronger. At the same time, the Arctic as a region for strategic competition has seized the world's attention, but the Arctic is more than a strategically or economically significant region. It's home to our people. Its hallmark has been and must remain peaceful cooperation. It's our responsibility to protect that peaceful cooperation and to build on it as neighbors and as partners.

So let me close by thanking everyone who has contributed to the broad range of Arctic Council initiatives, including government officials, permanent participants, working groups, expert groups, secretariats, observers. Thank you all for your diligence and commitment. The United States shares your commitment to the Arctic region. We look forward to working with you through this council for many years to come. Thank you.