

# **Arctic Council's Oulu SAO meeting May 15-16, 2002: Arctic Policies of the Observer Countries:**

## **Agenda Item 9**

### **The Netherlands**

Mr. Chairman,

The Netherlands has been involved in the Arctic region for centuries. As you know, the Barents Sea is named after the Dutch explorer Willem Barentsz, who spent a grueling winter on Novaya Zemlya in 1596/97 in his quest for a Northern sea route to Asia.

As a seafaring country, and a country actively involved in the protection of the global environment, we continue to have a great interest in Arctic affairs. We realize that the Arctic region plays a role of the utmost importance in climate issues. Not only does the region play an essential role in the global climate system, but Arctic research can also teach us a lot on how this system works.

Dutch scientists have been active in quite a few areas of Arctic research, and were involved from the beginning in cooperative programs like AMAP and CAFF. The establishment of the Arctic Council as a top-level body to coordinate all the various initiatives has inspired us to look at our own efforts in this area. These have been wide-ranging but somewhat fragmented. After a policy review lasting more than a year, the ministries concerned (Foreign Affairs; Transport, Public Works and Water Management; Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment; and Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries) drew up a policy paper on the Netherlands involvement in the Polar areas, which was approved by the Dutch Cabinet on April 12<sup>th</sup>. One of the new initiatives in this policy document is the decision to establish an Arctic Program in parallel to the Netherlands Antarctic Program which has been in existence since the 80's.

The Dutch Arctic Program consists of two parts. The first part is a program for Arctic research, for which the following research themes have been chosen:

- The role of the Arctic in the global climate system. Research covers subjects like the mass balance of the land ice of Greenland and the relation with the sea level.
- The role of the Arctic in the global biological systems. This theme covers the population dynamics of West-European migratory birds and the influence of climate changes on the Arctic vegetation.
- The role of the Arctic in the global biogeochemical cycles.
- Man in the Arctic system. Research on the indigenous peoples in the Arctic and the exploration and exploitation of the Arctic by West-European peoples is covered by this theme.

Aside from financing Netherlands Arctic research, the Netherlands Arctic Program will also continue to support the Netherlands participation in the international programs of the Arctic Council, focussing on programs with environmental aspects like AMAP, CAFF, ACIA and ACAP. We are now considering a specific contribution to the second phase of the PCB Project within the ACAP framework.

Mr. Chairman, the Arctic environment is fragile, and especially vulnerable to influences, including harmful substances, originating in the outside world. Cooperation between the Arctic countries and the countries outside the Polar Circle is therefore essential for the success of the Arctic Council. As an observer country in the Arctic Council from the beginning, the Netherlands appreciates the efforts you are now making to involve the observer countries more closely with the work of the Council and its programs. We will do what we can to support the activities of the Arctic Council directly and to strengthen the relations between the Arctic Council and the countries outside the Arctic Circle.

Thank you.