

Statement of Aleut International Association

Iqaluit, Nunavut, Canada

April 24, 2015

Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, Friends,

This meeting in Iqaluit represents an anniversary of sorts for Aleut International Association because nearly 17 years ago, in the first Iqaluit Declaration, AIA was approved by the Ministers as the fourth Permanent Participant in the Arctic Council. Two people were responsible, an amazing Aleut from St. George, Alaska, Flore Lekanoff, and an equally amazing Aleut from Nikolskoye, Russian Federation, Vladimir Dobrynin . They saw the potential of the Arctic Council and the need for Aleut voices to be included in it. I think that if Flore and Vladimir were here today they would be amazed and impressed by all that the Arctic Council has become, and, hopefully, by how AIA has grown and become involved in more areas of the Council than ever before. However, I also think they might be frustrated that issues identified in the earliest declarations of the Council, things like the support of the Permanent Participants, and the use of Traditional Knowledge in the work of the Council are still being discussed. I think they would also be concerned that geopolitical issues not related to the Arctic might threaten the discourse on Arctic issues and consensus based approach to decision making that is such a strength of the Council, and that a new emphasis on economic development, that potentially could neglect sustainability, might get in the way of the protection of the environment that has sustained the Aleut People for millennia. However, had Flore and Vladimir been involved in the work which took place during the last two years through the Canadian Chairmanship, I know that their impression would be positive and hopeful for the future.

During the past two years very encouraging progress has been made on the use of traditional knowledge in the Arctic Council, including a set of very good recommendations that now only need to be implemented with the support of the Arctic States. The support of the Canadian Chairmanship also allowed the Permanent Participants to come together to create our own set of principles for the use of TK in the Council's work, and it is our hope, that someday the Council might adopt these broadly. The support of Canada during these past two years has also allowed the PPs to come together to discuss support and capacity, and to develop a funding mechanism that has the potential to provide a simple and transparent way for Observers to the Arctic Council, and others, to help support the work of the Permanent Participants. Also, the Indigenous Peoples Secretariat is poised to become stronger and more efficient in its support of the PPs through relocation to Tromso, Norway to be collocated with the Arctic Council Secretariat. In fact, all of the Arctic Council working groups and task forces produced phenomenal deliverables these last two years, and in many ways, they deserve more attention than they receive.

A fundamental strength of the Arctic Council has always been the inclusion of the voices of the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic through the Permanent Participants and with so many of the Arctic's Indigenous People residing in the Russian Federation, including the Aleut people of the Commander Islands, represented by AIA, I would like to give the floor to one of those voices, Ivan Vozhikov, an AIA board member from the community of Nikolskoye.

The remainder of the text is spoken in Russian

Thank you.

There can be no doubt that the work of the Arctic Council, is vitally important to the Aleut people of the Aleutian, Commander and Pribilof Islands of the United States and Russian Federation, their well-being has been tied to the marine environment for millennia, so safe shipping, healthy eco-systems, freedom from contaminants and an understanding of what to expect from a changing climate are essential for the continuation of the Aleut way of life. The Aleut people are supremely adaptable; they have survived many hardships brought on by contact with the outside world, all while living in a tremendously challenging physical environment. Yet despite this resilience the challenges facing the Aleuts and indeed all of the Indigenous people of the Arctic are more varied and troubling than ever before. Now more than ever the Permanent Participants need the support of the Arctic Council to insure that their voice, their knowledge and their insight remains a strong and substantial part of the Council for all future Chairmanships.

For my part and representing the Aleut People of the Commander Islands, I would like to make a special request, that mechanisms to support the participation of the Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation receive special attention. I believe that by standing together with our friends and colleagues from ICC, RAIPON and the Saami Council we can make Russian Indigenous voices better heard, and make the work of the Arctic Council better and more useful for the Russian Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic.

Thank you all and my special thanks to the people of Iqaluit for their warm hospitality.