



INUIT

**Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting – May 11, 2017 – Fairbanks, AK  
(check against delivery)**

**Okalik Egeesiak, Chair, Inuit Circumpolar Council**

Ullukkut, Ministers, Ambassadors, distinguished guests, friends. It is a pleasure to meet here in beautiful Fairbanks on the traditional lands of the Tanana people and I want to recognize this and thank the Tanana people.

I speak to you today in my capacity as the International Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), I represent 160,000 Inuit from over 100 communities and villages throughout Chukotka, Alaska, Canada and Greenland – one people, one Arctic, and four countries with land that spans more than 5 million square kilometres.

Last year the Arctic Council celebrated twenty years – this year the Inuit Circumpolar Council celebrates 40 years. As others look north, as Inuit and Arctic Peoples look from the north, we have an opportunity today to take a moment to observe and reflect - we have done a great deal in the past 20 or 40 years, think of what we can accomplish in the next 40 to 50 years.

The United States has worked hard to advance the Arctic Council and we celebrate the success of their chairmanship. I believe the U.S. has made progress by supporting the peoples of the north and supporting effective policy development during their chairmanship. This is an ongoing evolution; each chairmanship moves the target forward as they bring new vision and life to the Council – this is healthy – this allows for renewal.

The role of the Council in promoting sustainable development through integration and harmonization of economic development, social development and environmental protection has been an important pillar.

To this end, reports and policy recommendations on food security, culture, mental wellness, suicide prevention, and on access to safe water and sewer are welcomed and will help with policy-making. A credit to the US Chairmanship.

We value U.S. efforts including work on heavy fuel oil, ocean acidification, and the engagement of indigenous peoples in discussions on marine protected areas. We look forward to continued implementation of the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment and further work of the Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation.

I must note that the results of all of the work done during the U.S. chairmanship would have benefitted greatly from an earlier involvement of the permanent participants during project planning stages and through the use of indigenous knowledge. Using indigenous knowledge and science together ensures a more complete and improved result in the work of the Council. We urge the Arctic states to continue and expand on the meaningful engagement with the permanent participants in the ongoing work of the Council. To continue to build upon this partnership and move the bench-mark up.

I also want to signal to the incoming Finnish Chair that you can count on ICC to support your chairmanship program. We applaud the establishment of the Task Force on Improved Connectivity in the Arctic – the Arctic requires this to be able to truly walk in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

ICC supports Finland's effort to improve Arctic community access to clean, affordable and renewable energy sources; recognizing the potential to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions; to enhance energy efficiency and conservation; and to reduce emissions of black carbon from energy production in the region.

The importance of education in fostering sustainable development in Arctic communities cannot be overstated and it is time to move forward on this to close the gap between southern and Arctic communities. We need innovative models and equal access to high quality education at all levels, from early childhood to post-secondary.

ICC applauds the Finnish chairmanship for prioritizing the importance of implementing the Paris Agreement on climate change and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In closing, let's celebrate the Arctic Council and its accomplishments together. Let's have the courage to make it even better. Build upon the support of the meaningful and equitable partnerships of the permanent participants at all working groups. Building upon the support and encourage the co-production of knowledge. By truly acknowledging, recognizing, respecting and integrating each others' worldviews and values, our collective achievement will be enhanced for the benefit of the Arctic indigenous peoples, the Arctic states and the rest of the world.