

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Arctic Council Meetings Held in Anchorage, Alaska May 3-6, 1999**

The Arctic Council's Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs), representatives of Arctic indigenous organizations that have Permanent Participant status, and representatives of accredited observers met for the first time under the chairmanship of the United States in Anchorage May 3-6. More than 140 delegates actively discussed and debated cooperative measures to promote environmental protection and sustainable development in the Arctic region. Gov. Tony Knowles welcomed delegates to Alaska and outlined Alaska's interests and priorities in Arctic cooperation.

The Arctic Council is a high-level intergovernmental forum established in 1996. The eight Member States of the Arctic Council are Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States. Permanent Participant status is currently held by the Aleut International Association, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, and the Saami Council.

#### **Environmental Protection**

Chairs from each of the Council's working groups reported on progress their groups have made towards fulfilling their mandates set forth by Arctic Council Ministers in Iqaluit, Canada, on September 18, 1998. Four of the groups, AMAP (Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program), CAFF (Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna), EPPR (Emergency Prevention, Preparedness, and Response), and PAME (Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment), address environmental issues such as contaminants, conservation of living resources, and environmental threats.

Delegations reviewed plans to further develop an Arctic Council Action Plan (ACAP), a key initiative that identifies priority contaminants for reduction of emissions, clean-up, including various heavy metals and persistent organic pollutants, and will recommend measures to be undertaken at the global, regional, and national levels to carry this out. Delegations reviewed progress on an important project to identify PCB-contaminated sites in the Russian Arctic and explore opportunities for their remediation. Delegations also agreed to consider a proposal to examine in much greater detail the implications of global climate change and UV on the entire Arctic region.

#### **Sustainable Development**

The Council's newly-established Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) held its first meeting on May 3-4. Networks of experts are being established to cooperate on projects as diverse as improving the health and well-being of Arctic children and youth, managing regional fisheries, assessing prospects for expanded use of telemedicine on a circumpolar basis, promoting cultural and eco-tourism, and improving rural sanitation systems.

The SDWG discussed issues related to emerging infectious diseases such as tuberculosis in the Arctic. The group also discussed the need for humanitarian assistance for residents of Russia's far North, including indigenous communities, in view of Russia's ongoing economic difficulties. The SDWG considered new proposals, including a "Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic" and the possibility of helping small communities in the Russian Arctic.

The SDWG also sought to identify common themes and possible priorities for the Council's sustainable development program. Potential thematic priorities emerged from the discussions, such as health, marine living resources, sustainable livelihoods, and rural communication and infrastructure. The SDWG will continue its discussions to develop a framework to guide the activities of the Council in sustainable development.

### **Public Awareness, Education and Outreach**

A Council priority is public outreach concerning Arctic issues within its mandate. Delegations were briefed on:

- U.S. science and education program, Global Learning and Observation to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE), which links primary and secondary schools around the world through the internet and collects valuable environmental data.
- progress in forming a University of the Arctic, which will promote use of internet and student/faculty exchanges among institutions of higher learning in the Arctic.
- the Arctic Council Web Site, <http://www.arctic-council.org/>. The web site could potentially be used to build a circumpolar inventory of Arctic research and other programmatic activities.

On the evening of May 5, a Public Forum hosted by Lt. Governor Fran Ulmer provided an opportunity for greater public awareness of the Council's work. The event was attended by Native Alaskans, environmental groups, scientists, students, educators, and business people. It will be televised throughout Alaska on ARCS on May 12.

The next Senior Arctic Officials meeting will take place in the fall of 1999 in Washington, D.C. Further information is available from the Arctic Council Secretariat, located in the U.S. Department of State.