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Equality Unit /
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Ref. SAO meeting in Rovaniemi, June 12 – 13, 2001

Revised first draft May 28th, 2001

CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN THE ARCTIC 2002

Introduction

The Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council proclaim commitment to promoting sustainable development in the Arctic region, including economic and social development, improved health conditions and cultural well-being, with the full involvement of the Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants.

Issues of gender equality have not yet been addressed within the Arctic Council, although equality has been promoted in networks or women from indigenous communities. The Government of Finland is committed in taking up issues related to the position of women and gender equality in the work of the Arctic Council during the Finnish Chairmanship.

In her letter to Ambassador Peter Stenlund, Ambassador Mary May Simon, from the Canadian Embassy in Copenhagen expresses Canada's will to support activities which will increase gender equality in the work on international fora. 'In this vein, we take this opportunity to share with you the proceedings of the Circumpolar Women's Conference titled Different Lives, Common Threads which was held in Whitehorse, Yukon in November of 1999.' The goals of the Whitehorse conference was: 'To bring together community, citizens, politicians, leaders, academics and youth to share their experiences and insights on a wide range of contemporary northern issues and experiences.'

Other women's fora have been arranged e.g. in the context of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 as well as other UN international conferences. The Nordic Council of Ministers has arranged two successive Nordic Forums for women (in Oslo, Norway and in Turku/Finland) and a Nordic Baltic conference in Valmiera, Latvia. The results of these meetings have been very encouraging.

Conference on Women in the Arctic

The Finnish Chair of the Arctic Council invites all member states and representatives of the Permanent Participants as well as Observers of the Arctic Council and other interested partners to discuss the situation of women in the Arctic, to special conference on women in the Arctic during the Finnish chairmanship.

Preparations for a proposal for the Conference on Women in the Arctic are currently under preparation. The scheme for the conference is still at an early stage, but following issues are proposed for consideration.

1. Goals of the conference

The primary goal for the conference should be to launch and to promote processes to mainstream gender equality in activities of the existing organizations and governmental institutions. The conference itself and the conference preparatory processes for the conference should offer a channel for cooperation, dialogue and interaction between women's organizations and networks and official bodies.

Indigenous peoples, indigenous women and diversity are a natural crosscutting feature in a conference for the Arctic Women. This would also link the conference to the Beijing process pointing out a special emphasis on questions concerning indigenous women. The conference should also be strongly future orientated dealing with broad issues such as health, economy, employment, information society, culture and education.

2. Themes

There are various issues that would merit as topics, that is why the Chair would welcome all partners to join in defining the primary themes during the preparation process. The following themes have been suggested:

- Economic and employment policy, entrepreneurship, education and training
- Education and culture with special references to native language
- Women in the Arctic and Information society
- Women's rights, including violence against women and trafficking in women

3. Conference Organisers and Partners

The main organisers of the conference will be the Arctic Council in cooperation with the Nordic Council of Ministers. The list is open to further organisers.

4. Conference Modalities and Participants

The conference participants should represent indigenous and other women, women's organisations, and networks, representatives of central and local governments, international organisations active in the region, research people and experts, and social partners. The number of participants is dependent on the funding of the conference but as a starting point for the preparations is suggested 250 participants. The funding of the conference is still largely open. The first draft budget for the meeting will be presented after survey of interested organising parties.

The duration of the conference is proposed to be two days. The conference languages are English and Russian. It would be most desirable, that lack of language skills would not prevent a person to participate the conference. Efforts will be made that Scandinavian, Finnish and some of the native languages of the indigenous peoples would be included in the languages to be interpreted at least to some extent.

5. Preparation of the Conference

A pilot study starting in May 2001 and to be completed in October 2001 has been launched by the Finnish government, to investigate and develop the initiative. The mandate of the pilot study has been given to the University of Lapland.

It would be a great help for the Chair if Member States, Permanent Participants and Observers of the Arctic Council as well as other relevant other organisations like NCM could provide the names of the contact persons for this conference.

The contact persons could form a reference group for the preparation of the conference. The mandate of such group could be to advice the conference organizers of the following issues:

- Assisting the organisers to reach the relevant partners, including women's networks and organisations to participate in the conference preparations
- Preparing the conference program
- Conference information plan
- Recruitment of participants
- Constructing the conference preparations with a view to mainstreaming gender equality into relevant national and international bodies and implementing of the conference results.

The reference group could meet 1-2 times in 2001 and 1-3 times in 2002. However the travelling costs cannot be funded by Host country. If so decided it would be most welcomed if the contact persons could be named **by the end of July** so that the first meeting of the group could take place in September 2001.