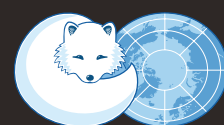


THE SECRETARIAT AT

10

LOOKING BACK
AT A DECADE
OF SUPPORT
TO THE ARCTIC
COUNCIL



ARCTIC COUNCIL

THE SECRETARIAT AT 10

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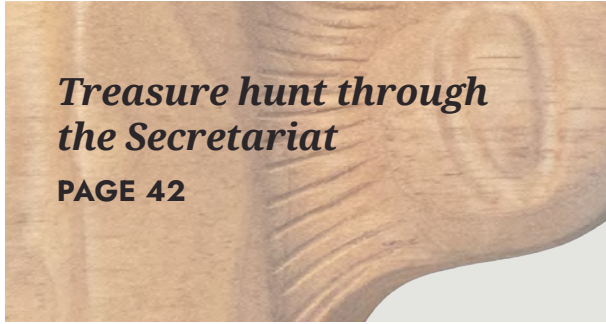
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FOREWORD

For the past quarter century, the Arctic Council has been the most important multilateral forum for Arctic issues. What started as a small yet ambitious forum in 1996 quickly grew into an international model of success. Today, it is evident that the Arctic Council Secretariat has played an important part in this accomplishment.



**MS ANNIKEN
HUITFELDT**

Minister of Foreign Affairs
of Norway

When Norway assumed its first Chairmanship in 2006, the Arctic Council just entered its second decade. Up until this point, secretariat services had been the responsibility of the State chairing the Council, and therefore rotated between the Arctic States every two years. With a growing number of projects under the Council's auspices, spanning ever more topics – from circumpolar climate assessments to sustainable development initiatives with the participation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and Observer states and organizations - the need for greater continuity and a broader range of support functions was evident.

To this end, Norway, together with the Kingdom of Denmark and Sweden, decided to jointly establish a temporary secretariat in Tromsø that would serve the three consecutive Scandinavian Chairmanships for the period 2006-2013. The value of the temporary Secretariat quickly became evident, and there was agreement to establish a permanent secretariat. But where would this new, permanent secretariat be located, now as the Chairmanship rotated across the Atlantic? Several options were on the table. Personally, I am very pleased that the choice fell on Tromsø, the Arctic capital of Norway. The Fram Centre – the High North Research Centre for Climate and the Environment, a unique institution bringing together



actors from Norway's Arctic, Antarctic and High North research communities, aptly became the Secretariat's permanent home.

On 21 January 2013, the host country agreement between Norway and the Arctic Council Secretariat was signed, formally establishing the Secretariat, and on 1 June the same year, the Secretariat was operational. Since then, the Secretariat has provided invaluable support to successive Chairmanships, adapting to evolving working modalities. Importantly, it has served as the Council's supportive backbone and institutional memory.

Under changing circumstances – what has remained consistent is the staff's knowledge, passion for the Arctic and dedication to the Council. As Norway enters its second Arctic Council Chairship, I am grateful to have the Secretariat's support and expertise as we navigate a new chapter in the Council's book. ●

Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt of Norway (center front), the Norwegian Chairship team/ with members of the Arctic Council Secretariat, Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat and AMAP Secretariat.

CREDIT: JESSICA COOK / ARCTIC COUNCIL SECRETARIAT

THE SECRETARIAT QUESTION – AND ITS LONG-WINDED ANSWER

The story of how the Arctic Council got a standing secretariat

**KRISTINA
BÄR**
Author

“The question of [a] permanent secretariat has been discussed for a long time in the Arctic Council,” Pekka Haavisto noted in his 2001 study on the structure of the work in the Arctic Council. Haavisto himself had five years earlier signed the Ottawa Declaration on behalf of Finland and the founding document of the Council specified that secretariat support functions should rotate sequentially among the Arctic States.

Yet, as the Council evolved, it started to outgrow structures laid by the preceding Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy. Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) had therefore been tasked at the Barrow Ministerial meeting in October 2000 to “consider and recommend ways to improve how work is structured in the Arctic Council” until the high-level representatives of the Arctic States reconvened in two years’ time in Inari, Finland. That’s when Haavisto got re-engaged with Arctic Council affairs.

Finland’s former Minister of Development and the Environment was a visiting researcher at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs at the time and he’d been commissioned by Finland’s Arctic Council Chairmanship to develop a review of the Council’s structures. The secretariat question was one of many aspects Haavisto outlined in the study that could enhance efficiency of the Council’s operations. In the long run, he wrote in the report, “a permanent secretariat would help the Arctic Council to strengthen its role as an Arctic cooperation [forum], and its capacity to deal with the new challenges of the Arctic”.

NO CONSENSUS (YET)

His draft report was presented in June 2001. By November, the Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials (SAO Chair) had discussed the matters presented in the study bilaterally with representatives of the other Arctic States to identify those recommendations that enjoyed support among the States and Permanent Participants. A permanent secretariat wasn’t one of them.

While Norway noted for the record that it regarded the need for a permanent secretariat as essential, the suggestion didn’t reach consensus. The SAO Report to Ministers in 2002 provided an initial answer to the secretariat question: “[...] the Council is operating as a high level forum without a permanent secretariat or financial resources of its own. The possible establishment of a permanent secretariat with an annual budget based on obligatory funding does not enjoy unanimous support among the Member States.”

“The United States was opposed to creating an Arctic Council Secretariat from the Council’s inception in 1996,” noted Julie Gourley, U.S. Senior Arctic Official (2005-2019). “We felt the chairing State could manage secretariat responsibilities without significant burden, and that a standing secretariat could take on a life of its own independent of the Arctic States becoming a sort of mini-international organization with its own identity, positions and relationships that would not necessarily reflect the Arctic States’ views.” Costs were another concern.

The secretariat question was put on hold for the time being. With the support of rotating secretariats, the Arctic Council continued to grow and establish itself as a leading forum on Arctic issues. In 2004, the Arctic Council



released landmark reports such as the *Arctic Climate Impact Assessment*, the *Arctic Human Development Report* and the *Arctic Marine Strategic Plan*, and interest in the Arctic grew proportionately with the speed of change in the region. But with increased attention and recognition came also growing administrative needs and even to states that previously had been opposed to a permanent secretariat, “it became clear that more intensive secretariat services would be beneficial,” wrote Julie.

NORWAY’S TACTICAL MOVE

Meanwhile, Norway and subsequently the Kingdom of Denmark and Sweden were preparing for their respective first Chairmanship terms, and Norway saw its chance to prove the benefits of a (more) permanent secretariat. At the Salekhard Ministerial meeting in 2006, the incoming Norwegian Chairmanship presented its two-year program and joint objectives and priorities of the consecutive Scandinavian Chairmanships – including the

decision to set up a temporary secretariat in Tromsø that would serve the Norwegian, Danish and Swedish Chairmanships from 2006 to 2012.

The Secretariat and overall discussions on the structure of the Council were back on the agenda. In a discussion paper on *Improving the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Arctic Council*, which the Arctic Athabaskan Council tabled for the SAO meeting in Tromsø in 2007, the organization stated it fully supported the establishment of the temporary Secretariat but also pointedly noted that this was “not the result of a collective decision by the Council”. This decision was still outstanding – and now it was in the hands of Norway to provide tangible arguments to the discussion.

Three people began working from Tromsø to support the Chairmanship: the Head of the Secretariat, an advisor on meetings and agendas and a communication officer with added logistics tasks. For all practical purposes they were formally employed by the

ABOVE: Karsten Klepšovik (SAO Chair during the first Norwegian Chairmanship and one of the main advocates for the permanent secretariat at an SAO meeting in Kautokeino.

CREDIT: HAROLD FINKLER / ARCTIC COUNCIL SECRETARIAT

Norwegian Polar Institute and were co-located on their premises in the Fram Centre - High North Research Centre for Climate and the Environment. From the day the temporary Secretariat became fully operational, in August 2007, to the end of the Norwegian Chairmanship in April 2009, the Secretariat staff was “making important contributions to improving the efficiency of the work of the Arctic Council, including advancing outreach and information sharing activities of the Arctic Council”, as described in the 2009 *SAO Report to Ministers*.

There had been some arguments about the exact language but in the *Tromsø Declaration*, the Arctic States were able to agree to “welcome Norway’s hosting of the Arctic Council Secretariat in Tromsø, 2007-2013, in cooperation with Denmark and Sweden, and appreciate the Secretariat’s contribution to the increased efficiency of the work of Arctic Council.”

TROMSØ VS REYKJAVIK

The temporary Secretariat had proven its value early on and as the Council was heading into the Danish Chairmanship, discussions on a permanent secretariat “began in earnest,” as Julie noted, and this time, consensus was reached. But that wasn’t the full answer to the secretariat question. Before Ministers could announce their unanimous support, another important decision had to be made: where would it be located?

Just hours before the Ministerial meeting in Nuuk was scheduled to take place, the Ministers of the Arctic States met for a private lunch and discussed the last two options on the table: Tromsø, the Northern Norwegian city that was currently home to the temporary secretariat, and Iceland’s capital Reykjavik. Both locations had strong arguments in their favor.

On the one hand, Reykjavik was a capital, strategically based between North America and Europe. Tromsø, on the other hand, was located north of the Arctic Circle and as Robert Kadas, Deputy SAO for Canada, noted: “Norway had done its homework.” The country was turning Tromsø into a global Arctic center and an Arctic Council Secretariat would fit nicely among other institutes that had been moved or established in the Arctic city.

Which argument tipped the vote remains among those seated at the lunch table, but in the end the Ministers agreed on the Arctic Council Secretariat’s home and announced in the 2011 *Nuuk Declaration* that they:

“Decide to strengthen the capacity of the Arctic Council to respond to the challenges and opportunities facing the Arctic by establishing a standing Arctic Council secretariat [...] in Tromsø, Norway to be operational no later than at the beginning of the Canadian Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2013”.

SWEDEN’S SPRINT

It had taken the Council 15 years to reach consensus on a permanent secretariat (and 10 years had passed since Pekka Haavisto pointed out that the question already had been discussed for a long time) – and suddenly everything had to move very quickly. “We had two years to get the job done,” Gustaf Lind recalled, then SAO Chair of the Swedish Chairmanship.

Besides solving the secretariat question, the Nuuk Declaration established a Task Force that would take care of the practicalities. The mandate for the Task Force for Institutional Issues (TFII), which would be chaired by Swedish SAO Andreas von Uexkull, was to provide SAOs with recommendations on “all necessary issues related to the establishment of the AC Secretariat in order for the Secretariat to be fully operational at the beginning of the Canadian chairmanship of the Arctic Council by 2013” (*SAO Report to Ministers*, 2011).

The annex of the 2011 SAO report included a “Framework for Strengthening the Arctic Council: Establishing a secretariat” and it summarized the scope of the newly established body in a nutshell: “The Secretariat will enhance the objectives of the Arctic Council through the establishment of administrative capacity and by providing continuity, institutional memory, operational efficiency, enhanced communication and outreach, exchange of information with other relevant international organizations, and to support activities of the Arctic Council.” The framework also determined that the ACS initially would have up to 10 staff members, its operations should be reviewed after six years and that the shared portion of the

administrative budget should not exceed USD 1 million.

Within those boundaries, it was up to the TFII to deal with the nuts and bolts: Would the Secretariat be purely administrative or provide research capacity? Would the ACS and staff have diplomatic status, such as embassies or the UN? How would those one million dollars be spent, what was the salary scale for staff?

WINE AND DINE THROUGH THE DEADLOCK

“It was an endless line-up of meetings,” Nina Buvang Vaaja, the head of the temporary Secretariat, remembered – and the clock was ticking. The Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the eight Arctic States were to meet one year into the Swedish Chairmanship, in May 2012. By then, all documents for establishing the standing Secretariat had to be finalized and provisionally adopted by SAOs. This included terms of reference, staff rules, financial rules, roles and responsibilities of the director, indicative budgets, an initial workplan – and as a bonus: the TFII was involved in drafting the Host Country Agreement between Norway and

the Secretariat, that formalized the legal parameters for Secretariat operations. (To put the full workload into perspective, the Task Force was also requested to revise the Council’s Rules of Procedure and to draft an Observer manual.)

And indeed, Deputy Ministers approved the suite of documents in May 2012 – but recounts of the preceding SAO meeting suggest that it was anything but smooth sailing to get this far. “The negotiations got stuck,” recalled Gustaf Lind, and the Swedish hosts decided that there was only one way out of the deadlock: It was time to close the notebooks, and instead to bring the delegates to the finest dining room of the government offices to wine and dine.

Half a year later, the SAOs appointed Magnús Jóhannesson, Permanent Secretary of the Icelandic Ministry of the Environment, as the first ACS director, and on January 21, 2012, he and Norway’s then Foreign Minister, Espen Barth Eide, signed the Host Country Agreement. The ACS was formally established – “the most important achievement,” as stated in the 2013 SAO Report to Ministers, for strengthening the institutional framework of the Arctic Council. ●●

BELOW: The signing of the Kiruna Declaration and the formal Arctic Council Secretariat documents.

CREDIT: ARCTIC COUNCIL SECRETARIAT





CONTINUITY AMIDST CHANGE: THE EVER-EVOLVING SECRETARIAT

ABOVE: The sun returns to Tromsø after nearly two months of polar night.

CREDIT: TOM YULSMAN / ARCTIC COUNCIL

Since its establishment in 2013, the Arctic Council Secretariat has evolved and grown, gained trust and new tasks, expanded the team and its services. The most important skill it has developed, however, is its ability to constantly adjust, and to find strength in the fact that change is the only constant.

**KRISTINA
BÄR**
Author

The Arctic Council Secretariat (ACS) was formally established on the day the sun returned to Tromsø after two months of polar night. The fact that the sun, according to a local newspaper, didn't actually make an appearance on 21 January 2013, is testimony to the Secretariat's Arctic location (and volatile weather conditions). For a group of Arctic Council delegates and guests arriving in the city it was a festive day, nonetheless. They had been invited by the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs to take part in the signing ceremony of the Host Country Agreement, the document that would officially establish a standing Arctic Council Secretariat (ACS) in Tromsø.

More than 140 people were welcomed to the event in the Fram Centre, witnessing how the ACS obtained the right to become a legal personality and to perform its functions in Norway. But at the end of the day, it was still a paper baby. After the speeches were delivered, the agreement signed, the flags of the Arctic States rolled up and the podium removed, it was up to the ACS' first Director, Magnús Jóhannesson, and the small team that had run the temporary Secretariat to bring the words on paper to life. The Secretariat had just become a legal entity, and now had to hire staff, rent offices, obtain computer equipment, open bank accounts, get insurance in place and so on,

before it could be fully operational by the time Canada assumed the Arctic Council Chairmanship in early summer.

A ROAD MAP FOR THE FIRST YEARS

The Task Force for Institutional Issues (TFII) had provided the ACS with a brief mandate and a preliminary work plan that focused on getting the Secretariat up and running. Apart from that, tasks and responsibilities were quite vague. “We had to find a role for the ACS,” stated Magnús. His aim was to identify as many responsibilities as possible for the ACS and the first opportunity presented itself quickly.

At the Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) meeting in October 2013, the Director was set to present the first biennial work plan and budgets for the Secretariat. Magnús and his team had a few months to develop a road map for the ACS’ initial years. TFII had identified communications as a key function. It also outlined that the ACS should provide services to Working Groups without a permanent secretariat, as well as manage the archiving of all the Council’s records.

This was where Magnús and his deputy, Nina Buvang Vaaja, saw an opportunity to strengthen the language on the ACS’ tasks. Communications would be a focus; the Council needed a presentable website and other outreach channels. But it also needed a more elaborate archiving system. “The access to many of the existing reports, including scientific reports from the Working Groups, was not good enough,” remembered Magnús. Hundreds of previously published reports had to be made more readily accessible, and previous Chairmanship documents across the Arctic that were likely destined to end up in storage boxes or worse had to be retrieved and systematically archived.

The golden feather in the cap of the first ACS work plan, however, was the secretariat services for two of the Council’s Working Groups that were without a permanent secretariat: the Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP) and the Emergency

Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR) Working Group. Once SAOs approved the work plan at the SAO meeting in Whitehorse, Canada, the ACS would provide that support from 2014 onwards – in addition to delivering secretariat services for the Task Force for Action on Black Carbon and Methane. The ACS would hire one person who would act as the Executive Secretary for EPPR and ACAP and integrate the secretariats of both Working Groups in its functions.

TWO LEARNING CYCLES

While the work plan provided the basis for the ACS’ operations, another factor influenced its daily work and priorities (and continues to do so today). “The ACS will always be what the States and Permanent Participants want it to be,” said Nina. This especially applies to the country chairing the Arctic Council and overseeing the ACS’ activities.

During its first Chairmanship cycles, the ACS supported two of the larger administrations in the Arctic: Canada and the United States. Jesper Stig Andersen, seconded from the Kingdom of Denmark, remembered that: “No one seemed to know what the ACS really was or how to use it.” Staff carried roll-ups and observed as Canada came in with a whole

Secondments

Over the past ten years, the ACS has been fortunate to receive support and company from six secondments. In the words of Jesper Stig Andersen, this has provided a triple benefit: The seconding state gets an in-depth insight into how the Council operates and builds in-house capacity once the secondee returns to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the ACS receives a temporary team member who is “a real-life diplomat” and brings an Arctic State’s perspective; and the secondee her-/himself builds professional skills and learns about Arctic affairs on a circumpolar level.

Nina Buvang Vaaja
Norway
2013-2015

Jesper Stig Andersen
Kingdom of Denmark
2014-2015

Anne Meldgaard
Kingdom of Denmark
2015-2017

Iina Peltonen
Finland
2016-2017

Anne-Birgitte Hansen
Kingdom of Denmark
2017-2019

Inna Tarysheva
Russian Federation
2017-2023

infrastructure, including a summits management office, an expanded diplomatic team and dedicated officials from many governments departments to support their Chairmanship term.

There might not have been a clear-cut role for the ACS in those first years, but the small team knew how to leverage the opportunity to work so closely and effectively with these large administrations. “I really liked this period of my career with many interesting tasks in the office, and many interesting and long travels,” said André Skrivervik, Office Manager and later Head of Administration at the ACS. “I was privileged to work with some very nice and highly skilled people, and I really learned a lot during this first period when the ACS was trying to navigate and establish itself in this new, more formal capacity.” It was the time to learn and absorb, then before too long, the Secretariat would be able to draw on these competencies and support Chairmanships with leaner in-house resources.

This is not to say that the ACS enjoyed an extended period of grace. The Canadian and U.S. Chairmanships were among other things the heyday of Task Forces and ACS staff offered administrative and coordination support for up to three Task Forces at a time. Constantly on the road, some members of the small ACS team barely spent half a year in Tromsø.

AN ENABLER FOR GROWTH

These formative years demonstrated that the ACS’ ability to change and adapt was key – or in the words of Magnús: “To successfully serve a Chairmanship, you have to be on your toes.” Adapting to the changing needs of the Council and individual Chairmanships did not only enable the ACS to provide efficient support, but it also helped to build the one foundation that was essential for the ACS to evolve and continue to grow: trust. “It wasn’t written anywhere in the first work plans that the ACS would advise the Chair on institutional matters, we had to earn these taskings.”

The ACS’ duties received a considerable upgrade when the SAOs received the tasking in the Fairbanks Declaration 2017 to develop a strategic plan for ministerial approval two years later. Preparing for the long-term strategic planning, the SAOs decided to bring the expertise of the ACS on board. The Secretariat was tasked to assemble any guidance on long term priorities in the Council’s archives, as well as research strategies of other organizations/fora similar in size or nature, and to prepare overview papers and analytical memos.

As the Council’s level of activity grew, so did the ACS’ portfolio. And one can argue, vice versa. “The Council could not have grown as it has if it hadn’t had a standing secretariat,” Nina is convinced. The Council now had staff in Tromsø dedicated to communicating its work and outcomes; it had an open access repository at its disposal that allowed anyone to find reports and meeting documents; it had people that could channel requests from non-Arctic states and organizations interested to engage in its activities; and it had a team that was able to give advice on procedural matters, offer institutional knowledge and ensure continuity and provide guidance when Chairmanships were changing. As Robert Kadas, Deputy SAO for Canada, put it: “The Secretariat legitimized the Council as a real international body.”

A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

For ten years now, the ACS has supported the Council’s work, assisted in guiding it through a pandemic and kept the lights on during the pause of all official Arctic Council activities. It has “relieved the Arctic States of an administrative burden and freed up time and resources for more substantive work,” said Julie Gourley, SAO for the United States (2005-2019). It has provided “confidence and comfort that the work is being done and being done well,” added Robert Kadas – to the extent that “sometimes we forget how much the ACS is helping and driving the Arctic Council forward, the team is so professional,” mentioned Anne Meldgaard, Deputy SAO for the Kingdom of Denmark and secondment to the ACS from 2015 to 2017).

So, what’s next? At the time of writing this article, the Council’s formal activities are still on pause. Nonetheless, those who have shaped and followed the Secretariat for its first decade provide a glimpse on what the future for the ACS might hold: a role in overseeing the progress of implementing the Strategic Plan, a potential to take a more active role in cooperation with relevant international organizations, a possibility for the ACS to take on a research role for the Council – all while continuing to grow in concert with the Council.

Time will show, but Nina says one thing will remain: “The Secretariat does not operate in a vacuum, it will be changing constantly, and it will always have to adapt to a new Chairmanship. If a Chairmanship team wants our advice and experience, the Secretariat can thrive and develop, function as and build on the institutional memory.” ●



ABOVE: Arctic Council “family photo” in Hveragerdi, Iceland, October 2019. Foreground: Arctic Council Secretariat staff Tiia Tanskanen and Joël Plouffe. CREDIT: K. BAER / ARCTIC COUNCIL SECRETARIAT

ACS review

According to the terms of reference of the ACS, the Secretariat was to be reviewed six years from the date it became operational. The review was performed during Iceland’s Chairmanship of the Arctic Council by the Icelandic National Audit Office (INAO) who submitted its report in February 2020. INAO’s main conclusion was that the ACS was operating well and has “operated efficiently and effectively in support of the Arctic Council and is considered to have successfully met the objectives underlying its establishment”. The current structure of the ACS was referred to as “lean, efficient and flexible and has offered the Arctic Council exceptional value for money.”

BELOW: 2013 SAO Chair Patrick Borbey opens a meeting with the Arctic Council gavel. From left to right: Arctic Council Secretariat Director Magnus Johannesson, SAO Chair Patrick Borbey, and Yukon Premier Darrell Pasloski. CREDIT: ARCTIC COUNCIL SECRETARIAT



○ Reindeer spotting

○ Fishing for cod

WELCOME TO TROMSØ

Most of the Secretariat's staff have moved to Norway, and the Arctic, for the first time. Here are some of the things they love about their new home.

○ A weekend trip on the fast ferry

○ Visiting the world's northernmost botanical garden

○ Skiing on a sunny day

○ Picking berries and mushrooms

○ Viewing the northern lights

○ Buying local vegetables in the autumn

○ Midnight sun trail running

○ "Utepils"- a beer outside in the sunshine

○ Reading at a coffee shop

○ Our team!

○ Grilling pølser (sausages) over a fire

○ Welcoming back the sun in January

○ Climbing 1,203 stairs for an amazing view of the city

"I am happy that the secretariat of the Arctic Council is being added to Tromsø. This will strengthen the work of the Arctic Council, and strengthen Tromsø as the center for Arctic issues, both in Norway and internationally."

JONAS GAHR STØRE, 2013 - THEN FOREIGN MINISTER, NOW PRIME MINISTER OF NORWAY

Some important Norwegian concepts, according to the Secretariat

ut på tur Out in nature, on a hike

When I moved to Tromsø, and coming from Copenhagen, I thought that everyone greeted each other on the streets here. But an embarrassing day later I learned my lesson that Norwegians only say “hi” to other people when they are in the mountains. - *JT*

The hikes that Norwegians consider "easy" are definitely not, at least for me. Expect at least 800m straight up a mountain! - *SN*

Many Norwegians grow up with a strong connection to nature and the mountains, and you can sometimes see kids not older than 5 years going on extremely technical hikes. - *MW*

tacofredag Taco friday

The amount of waffles and frozen pizza consumed by Norwegians is incredibly high. Tacos are basically considered the national food, and these should be eaten on Fridays. - *MW*

[ja:↓] A sharp inhale, a sign of active listening

It will forever make me think that person is either shocked by what I have said or is choking. - *RA*

å kose seg i sola To enjoy the sun

The first time I visited the ACS (on a sunny day after weeks of rain), the management told me that staff take time off when the sun is out. Then I laughed, but I have since come to value a ray of sunshine just as much as Norwegians and anyone else living in the North. - *KB*

hjemmekjær Love of home

I find it interesting that while Norwegians are very adventurous people who like roaming the world, they really love Norway. Their country is in their hearts. I have met Norwegians who had had really successful careers elsewhere, but they moved back to Norway when they decided it was time to settle and start a family... They are like migratory birds, who travel long distances, but always return to the place they were born in. - *KI*

ARKTISK RÅD
EN INTRODUKSJON

TREDJE UTGAVN

JESSICA
COOK
Author

A VOICE FOR THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

How the Council's communications strategy
was implemented over the years

Communication plays an invaluable role for the Arctic Council. The recommendations, tools and other products produced by the Working Groups have little value if they aren't shared with the people that can make change or are affected by it. Today, the Arctic Council Secretariat (ACS) plays the key role in establishing the framework for communications and in implementing the Arctic Council's communications strategy. But the road to get here was long, and the Arctic Council's public voice has been shaped over time.

FINDING A VOICE

The Council adopted its first comprehensive Communications Strategy (2012-2016) during the 2011-2012 Swedish Chairmanship. The plan highlighted that, “communication work should demonstrate that the Arctic Council is active, how its work is relevant and how its debate and decision-making processes make it a credible source of information for the media and other target groups.”

At the same time, the Council was working on setting up a standing ACS that would be able to dedicate more efforts towards implementing the strategy. Two ACS staff, Linnea Nordström (Website Officer 2013-2018) and Tom Fries (Communications Officer 2013-2018), spearheaded the execution in close cooperation with the Canadian and U.S. Chairmanships.

“It’s important to get the Council’s work out there,” said Linnea Nordström, reflecting on why it was important for the Arctic Council to find its public voice. “Especially in regard to Indigenous Peoples’ participation in the forum, it’s exciting to highlight this important and unique feature.”

Tom Fries also sees the importance on a governmental level. “The Arctic Council is exciting because it establishes what issues we want to look at and how we talk about them. It’s moving dialogue on Arctic issues faster than it would in other, bigger forums. Active communication encourages organizations to more quickly address issues that the Arctic Council sets on its agenda,” said Tom.

As important as it is for the Arctic Council to communicate, it’s a challenging and time-consuming task to take on.

“Communications can be a lonely role,” said Tom. “At the end of Senior Arctic Official (SAO) meetings everyone else would have

gone, maybe to have a celebratory drink and network, and left alone in the giant meeting room were myself and Linnea, typing away for hours working on time sensitive communications materials.” Press releases, social media posts, responding to media requests, coordinating interviews and document uploading are just some of the tasks that come immediately following Arctic Council meetings.

DEVELOPING A SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

As the first communications strategy was getting off the ground, the Swedish Chair of the SAOs, Gustaf Lind, pushed for the Arctic Council to have a social media presence. He made an SAO Chair Twitter account – the first Arctic Council affiliated channel – before Tom stepped in to establish the Council’s own official social media channels.

According to Tom, it took a lot of invisible work to get the Council’s social channels up and running, including establishing trust and a good working relationship with Chairmanship teams. “Keep in mind, the Arctic Council shouldn’t say anything that isn’t approved language by all eight Arctic States. So, the machinery of establishing what to say and how to say it had to be set up and maintained. We had to ensure that every word published is something that each State and Permanent Participant would be comfortable saying themselves,” said Tom.

Creating a strong multimedia library was an equally important task, as every image the Arctic Council publishes ultimately influences how the public perceives the Arctic. Linnea used her eye for photography to develop a comprehensive photo library with images from events, locations around the Arctic, people, wildlife and much more – a resource that’s still used and built upon today.

BUILDING AN ONLINE LIBRARY ARCHIVE

In 2013, Linnea took the lead in creating the first Arctic Council website that would last beyond just one Chairmanship. As the website launched, Linnea had an ambitious goal: to build an open access database of all official Arctic Council reports and assessments. A foundation that would grow to become the Council's Open Access Repository.

“My goal was for all Arctic Council documents to live together in an online repository. It was important for back up and security reasons, and I also wanted to include metadata to make the documents visible on search engines,” said Linnea.

To build the database, she worked closely with Chairmanships, States' national archives and the Council's Working Groups to upload, organize and optimize all documents. During this time, open access was just beginning from an academic perspective. And the Arctic Council was early to this trend.

MEDIA NARRATIVES AND MESSAGING

The initial voice of the Council focused on communicating what it is and highlights from the Chairmanships. Messaging was frequently pulled from the agreed-upon language in the Ottawa Declaration. At the same time, it was acknowledged that more content variety was needed to communicate the breadth of its work.

With the 24-hour news cycle and sensationalist headlines that the Arctic region tends to attract, the Arctic Council information communicated through its official channels often finds itself at odds with misinformed news articles. To counteract false narratives, communications staff established relationships with journalists, analysts and researchers to

spread awareness of what the Arctic Council is and to ensure factual reporting. A post-SAO meeting press briefing became common practice. Between meetings, outreach efforts began focusing more on the promotion of project work, which offered proof that the Arctic is a governed region filled with people, life and diverse challenges and solutions.

A GROWING TEAM

In 2019, after Tom and Linnea had moved on from the ACS to different roles, there was another turning point in Arctic Council communications. Kristina Bär stepped into the role as Communications Officer, now Head of Communications.

“I wanted to build upon the strong foundation that was laid before my time. I saw potential in bringing more attention to the Working Groups and the topics they are addressing on a daily basis. I also wanted to put a more human face to the Council, meaning more interviews with the people who are doing the core work of the Council,” said Kristina. A major goal was to focus on communications thematically, decoupling topics from the bureaucratic structure of the Council allowing people to focus on issues and outcomes without getting lost in a forest of structural details.

Kristina entered the job just before the Rovaniemi Ministerial meeting – a time in which communication work went into overdrive with significant international media attention. To effectively manage the growing focus on Arctic Council communications, more staff would be needed. At the end of 2019, Sue Novotny (Web and Digital Media Officer) joined the ACS followed by Jessica Cook (Public Relations Officer) in early 2020. As of January 2020, the ACS communications team was three-women strong with an enhanced capacity to dream and deliver big.



A COHESIVE VISUAL IDENTITY

The Arctic Council's Working Groups each have their own branding outside of the Arctic Council, which, to the general public, can create confusion – and in some cases the link to the Arctic Council could become lost. Developing a cohesive visual identity was discussed over the years, and in 2020 with impetus from the new communications team and a tasking from SAOs, the ACS took the lead in updating the Council's branding.

"I started by looking at what was currently working across the board – the colors, typography, types of photos used," said Sue, who led the new visual identity process. "The new color scheme was pulled from photos of Arctic tundra, ocean and ice, and was similar to the colors Working Groups were already using. I also created layout templates and guidelines so there would be a common look and feel to the products Working Groups produced."

"Importantly, this work was done in close cooperation with all Working Groups to ensure they had ownership over their brand and felt good about the changes being made. There's also flexibility within the design guidelines,

so that Working Groups still have room to be creative and distinctive within the bounds of the new visual identity," added Sue.

NEW TEAM, NEW INITIATIVES

In addition to general news articles, the communications team began writing in-depth feature stories with a goal to position the Arctic Council as a leader in all things Arctic, be a strong resource for those who wanted to learn more and highlight the people connected to the Council who are making a difference. Building strong relationships with Working Group secretariats as well as communication staff from Arctic States was a key task that enhanced and strengthened cohesive messaging across different channels in the Arctic Council family.

Social media efforts were expanded with the launch of an Instagram account, which provided a visual platform to showcase the Arctic and the work being done in the region. With the Instagram launch also came a new initiative to reach a younger audience and to communicate the Council's work in a simple yet compelling tone – both to humanize the Arctic Council and to make its work

ABOVE: Tom Fries with the Arctic Council booth at the 2017 Arctic Circle Assembly

CREDIT: LINNEA NORDSTRÖM / ARCTIC COUNCIL SECRETARIAT

assessable to more people. The Council's social media channels now reach over 23K on Twitter, 10K on Facebook and 3.3K on Instagram.

With a renewed focus on content development, and to highlight achievements made during the Icelandic Chairmanship (2019-2021), the ACS published its first magazine, titled Pathways. Intended as a biennial magazine published at Ministerial meetings, Pathways featured articles about the Council's work in a storytelling format with a goal to give policy makers and Arctic-interested people a glimpse into the important work of the Council. With contributions and input from States, Permanent Participants and Working Groups, the magazine was a testament to the Council's strong network and valuable projects that make a difference on the ground. The magazine was given directly to Foreign Ministers at the Reykjavik Ministerial meeting and sent to embassies and offices around the world.

In September 2021, the Arctic Council celebrated its 25th anniversary. While numerous outreach initiatives were planned throughout the year, a highlight was a documentary film about the establishment of the Council. The 23-minute film featured prominent figures – from foreign ministers to Arctic Council founding members – and highlighted successes over decades of important work.

TURNING COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

When the Council was still developing its voice, communications efforts were focused on building an audience – producing Arctic-focused content and promoting it broadly. Now that the Council has a voice

and following, a future goal is to take a more targeted approach to communications, bringing knowledge to the people it affects and ensuring Arctic communities benefit from the wealth of knowledge the Council produces.

When the Arctic Council entered a pause in 2022, external communication was suspended, but the communications team took a quick pivot into building new skills such as animation and podcasting, investing in better multimedia equipment and resources and planning for a sharp comeback for when communications can resume.

The communications team hopes that an unprecedented situation can make way for unique opportunities – namely, thinking outside the box when it comes to communications. It's an opportunity for the Arctic Council to think beyond “how should an international organization traditionally act”, and instead focus on people: who we want to reach, where they get their information and how we can be creative in meeting them where they are.

As the Arctic Council takes a pause and rests its voice, it's important to reflect on the impact it has made – from informing policy makers and inspiring change to empowering local communities with tools and information that makes a difference in their lives. Its voice may evolve over time, but communications will always play a crucial role in the Arctic Council. ●

NAVIGATING THE PANDEMIC

How the Arctic Council Secretariat and Icelandic Chairmanship enabled the continuation of the Council's work in a virtual realm

JESSICA
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Authors

In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of the novel coronavirus a pandemic, bringing drastic changes to people's lives overnight. As offices closed their doors, people hunkered down at home and the smell of hand sanitizer lingered around every corner, it was a stark reminder of how vulnerable societies can be in the face of infectious diseases.

The Arctic Council was created to bring together representatives from Arctic States, Arctic Indigenous Peoples and experts in a wide variety of fields. Arctic Council meetings are an important place not only for diplomatic, scientific and cultural exchange, but also for fostering a community that's been fondly called the Arctic Council family. With in-person meetings being the backbone of the Council, how could it continue when governments were discouraging face-to-face interactions? Under leadership of Iceland and with support from the Arctic Council Secretariat (ACS), delegates replaced handshakes and greetings with waves and "can you hear me?" and officially entered the virtual diplomatic world.

A "TEAMS" EFFORT: MAKING THE ARCTIC COUNCIL VIRTUAL

How do you move an intergovernmental forum with established in-person rules of procedure online? Step one was finding a meeting platform that would accommodate technical requirements from eight states and Permanent Participants in low-bandwidth areas. The chosen platform also had to be secure, user-friendly and simple for dozens of delegates to use efficiently and offer a means for language interpretation. In some cases, the ACS came up with unconventional solutions for interpretation, with assistance from both ACS staff and outsourced interpreters.

Guidelines for online participation were developed, and the ACS formed a technical team together with the Icelandic Chairmanship that was on standby to help with all technical challenges that came up.

On 24 June, the first virtual meeting commenced around the Arctic at 04:00, 08:00, 13:00, 18:00 and many time zones in addition and in between. As virtual meetings continued throughout 2020 and the beginning of 2021, the Council not only got better at navigating the virtual realm but also made quite a few unique memories. One Permanent Participant delegate logged into a meeting from the parking lot of a school to get better internet but stayed locked in her car to protect herself from bear danger - a humbling reminder of the realities of the Arctic.

BRIEFING DOCUMENT

Arctic communities have faced unique risks and challenges as a result of both the pandemic and the actions taken to respond to it. Vulnerabilities in health systems, weak infrastructure and livelihoods that rely on crossing borders are just some of the issues faced by Arctic communities. On the other hand, many Arctic



communities also have valuable strengths that have aided during the pandemic.

To get an overview of the unprecedented and quickly evolving situation, the then Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials requested that the Council's Sustainable Development Working Group and the ACS collect available information on the impacts of the pandemic in the Arctic from experts, policymakers and Indigenous representatives and knowledge holders connected to the Arctic Council.

The coordinating team ignited the Arctic Council network, and in a testament to its strength, over 50 experts from all Arctic States and Permanent Participants provided input and source material that culminated in a briefing document for Senior Arctic Officials. It featured 12 thematic sections that covered topics spanning from epidemiological data to patient care, from impacts on local economies to public infrastructure. The briefing document informed discussions within the Arctic Council and paved the way for future work that focuses on and addresses the key topics included within.

ONLINE VS. ON THE GROUND

Even before the pandemic, the Arctic Council and its Working Groups had been using and exploring new opportunities provided by virtual meeting tools. For example, in 2018 ACAP agreed, when possible, to have just one face-to-face meeting a year and to hold all other meetings by teleconference to reduce its carbon footprint. While digital platforms opened new opportunities for knowledge sharing and co-production,

they often failed to provide the same level of interaction due to connectivity issues, language barriers, digital incompetence, psychological barriers, trust levels and more. Therefore, the pre-pandemic transition from in-person to virtual platforms was slow. When the COVID-19 outbreak happened, it inadvertently sped up the process.

During the last six months leading to the Ministerial (2021) – the busiest season in the Arctic Council's 2-year cycle – there was hardly a day for the Secretariat's staff without at least one virtual meeting. To accommodate needs of participants from different time zones (with a time difference of 18 hours between Anchorage, Alaska and Tokyo, Japan), sometimes the ACS staff joined meetings at 06:00 or in the middle of the night, other times meetings ended at midnight. The borders between work and personal life started to disappear. A year into the pandemic, the Arctic Council family also included children, dogs and cats who regularly crashed online meetings. Health breaks were scheduled to allow some participants to drive their children to school or walk their dogs.

On one hand, it takes less time to arrange an online meeting. On the other hand, you have less time for preparation. Usually, this would be done during travel time, but there were no flights that could be used for it. Besides, in the case of in-person meetings, participants usually have several days during which they can focus on the matters at hand, while an online meeting is just a fragment of their working day. When the meeting ends, they have to immediately switch focus and attend to all the other tasks, responsibilities and other online meetings. There was hardly time to

follow up on the things agreed at the meeting. As a result, we started witnessing what's known as "virtual meeting fatigue."

Meetings, workshops and conferences weren't the only aspects of the Working Groups' operations that were disrupted by the pandemic. Fieldwork, an essential component of many Arctic Council projects, was affected too. Lockdowns and travel restrictions in many cases made access to some sites impossible. Moreover, as many Arctic Indigenous Peoples and local communities are especially vulnerable during the pandemic due to their remoteness, postponing field work in these communities was the most responsible thing to do. As a response to the pandemic, the Working Groups adjusted some of their practices. For example, ACAP requested that project leads include information on COVID-19 considerations and precautions into project proposals. In EPPR, first a table-top exercise was transferred to an online platform, but later on, even a joint live exercise with Arctic Coast Guard Forum was converted to fit virtual reality. While these were pandemic adjustments and wouldn't cover all needed aspects for the future, valuable lessons were learned.

On the positive side, the pandemic showed how helpful online meetings could be in finding alternative ways of advancing projects or processes. Shorter but more frequent online meetings help to keep the momentum. With the world moving faster, science, research and planning for a sustainable future have to be proactive, to produce data and initiate actions to meet the rapidly changing conditions. For example, online consultations or editorial calls have proved to be really helpful when collaborating on texts and agreeing on the wording of recommendations. The process which previously took weeks via correspondence can be concluded within several hours in real time. We may predict that going forward, instead of two meetings a year, the Working Groups are likely to have additional online meetings throughout the year to keep up with the demands of the time.

A STRATEGIC PLAN AND BUBBLES

In the spring of 2021, hope and great ambitions were on the horizon. Vaccines were beginning to be administered, new treatments were found effective, and as the Arctic Council neared its Chairmanship transition period, renewed optimism and ambition arose to develop a new strategy for the Council.



The last in-person Arctic Council meeting before the world shut down in 2020 was a retreat in Tromsø to discuss the strategic future of the Arctic Council. That in-person retreat paved the way for virtual negotiations. From many early mornings to late evenings, the Arctic Council Strategic Plan came to life through GoToMeeting.

As the months crept closer to the Ministerial meeting, conditions surrounding the pandemic meant that a hybrid meeting would be possible. In close cooperation with the Icelandic health authority, the Icelandic Chairmanship planned a limited in-person Ministerial with Ministers from all eight Arctic States and representatives from the six Permanent Participants, with virtual participation from Working Group representatives and Observers. To ensure such a meeting could be conducted safely, a "bubble" system was developed so that those who were vaccinated or had quarantined were grouped together into one bubble, and those who weren't vaccinated or didn't have time to quarantine due to travel scheduling formed their own bubble. The 2021 Arctic Council Ministerial meeting was one of the first international meetings to take place in-person since the start of the pandemic. It proved that with the right precautions in place, in-person meetings can be both valuable and safe.

At the end of the day, we can say that digitalizing Arctic cooperation was a success, and the transition to online diplomacy opened new doors. While virtual and hybrid models allow for more inclusivity and promote sustainable meeting practices, in-person possibilities allow for stronger interpersonal connections and cooperation. There's a time and place for both formats, and the Arctic Council is now well-equipped to handle them. ●

The Secretariat comms team separated by a bubble. Kristina Bär, Jessica Cook and Sue Novotny at the 2021 Arctic Council Ministerial meeting.

CREDIT: KRISTINA BÄR

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THE ARCTIC COUNCIL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' SECRETARIAT

Supporting the Cooperation of the Arctic Indigenous Peoples

The Indigenous Peoples Secretariat (IPS) is an independent unit within the Arctic Council Secretariat (ACS) with its own Governing Board, budget and work plan. The IPS was recognized as an institution in the 1996 Ottawa Declaration, the founding document of the Council. In 2016, the IPS moved from Copenhagen to Tromsø to be co-located with the ACS. Ever since, the two secretariats have worked closely together, while operating under their respective mandates and serving the Council in their designated ways. The IPS predates its sister secretariat by almost two decades. This is the story of the IPS and its establishment, move to Tromsø and vision for the future.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE IPS

The story of the IPS started in Nuuk, Greenland, in 1993 during the second Ministerial meeting of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS). During the meeting, the Minister for the Environment of the Kingdom of Denmark supported the creation of special program area for Indigenous Peoples' organizations and the establishment of a secretariat to support their work. The IPS started its operations in December 1994 when the Arctic States opened up the AEPS organizational structure for cooperative action amongst the Saami Council, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) and the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC).

The official opening of the IPS took place on 16 February 1995, with a reception hosted by the Greenland Home Rule Denmark Office in Copenhagen. The IPS and the Indigenous Peoples' organizations fought hard to include Indigenous voices into the structure of the Arctic Council when it was established the following year. As a result of this work, Indigenous Peoples became a central part of the Council.

The 1996 Ottawa Declaration recognized the IPS, stating that "the Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat established under AEPS is to continue under the framework of the Arctic Council". And so, after the AEPS Ministerial meeting in Norway in June 1997, the AEPS Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat became the Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat, which continued to be hosted by and co-housed with the Greenland Home Rule Denmark Office in Copenhagen until its relocation to Tromsø, Norway, in 2016.

"The establishment of the Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat was a huge and necessary historic achievement in order to facilitate the needs of the peoples of the Arctic."

HJALMAR DAHL, ICC GREENLAND PRESIDENT 2014-2022 AND CHAIR OF THE IPS BOARD 2021-2023

"IPS' primary role was to assist the three Indigenous Peoples' organizations to fully participate in the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy process where they held a special status granted in Nuuk.... That time there was an urgent need for a secretariat which could provide better coordination and communication among the three Indigenous Peoples' organizations, identify information needs, archive and fundraise."

ALONA YEFIMENKO, IPS ADVISOR 1995-2020

RELOCATION FROM COPENHAGEN TO TROMSØ

In 2016, the IPS moved from Copenhagen to Tromsø. The discussion of relocation had started much earlier, and it had been a part of the general discussion of the establishment of the ACS in Tromsø. "Norway flagged early in the process that they were prepared



IPS' first Executive Secretary, Nils Ole Gaup (from Norwegian side of Sápmi) with a representative of the Greenland government in the IPS inauguration in 1994 in Copenhagen. The Greenland government's Representation office in Copenhagen offered many in-kind services for the IPS, including office space.

CREDIT: IPS

to host the ACS in Tromsø, which then started discussions on the possible relocation of the IPS,” said Elle Merete Omma, IPS Executive Secretary in 2014-2017, who was hired to follow up on the relocation of the IPS from Copenhagen to Tromsø.

For PPs, the IPS’ independence has always been crucial and they didn’t want to jeopardize it in the relocation process. With the relocation, the IPS became a unit at the ACS, but remained independent with its own Governing Board, budget and work plan. Sharing the office with the ACS brought synergies between the two secretariats and strengthened communication, for example, simply by informally sharing information over coffee, as Elle Merete underlined.

The IPS funding and the ability to fundraise were the other key discussion points during the IPS relocation negotiations, which continue to be a high priority today. While the ACS is funded through contributions by all eight Arctic States, only Norway and the Kingdom of Denmark jointly fund the IPS since its relocation, providing equal funding to the IPS administrative budget. In various Council meetings, PPs and the Chair of the IPS Board have acknowledged the generosity and commitment from the Kingdom of Denmark and Norway towards the IPS, and its ability to support PPs’ participation in Arctic Council activities. For many PPs, however, additional resources for the IPS are required moving forward to strengthen the IPS and enable it to thrive in fulfilling its mandate, which is to support all PPs. As such, discussions around IPS administrative funding, as well as the Secretariat’s ability to fundraise in support of specific projects or initiatives, remain very much relevant and are still ongoing today.

“The independence of the IPS was very important. And it still is! One of the questions was if this relocation and incorporation into ACS would affect the independence of IPS. From the outside, it still seems pretty independent.”

JOHN CRUMP, ICC CANADA SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR, IPS EXECUTIVE SECRETARY 2002-2005

“If only two States are to fund the IPS with quite limited budgets, that will mean that the IPS should then be able to fundraise for other projects.... In the negotiations, we came to an agreement that the IPS fundraising was allowed and accepted.”

ELLE MERETE OMMA, HEAD OF EU UNIT OF SAAMI COUNCIL, IPS EXECUTIVE SECRETARY 2014-2017

“In 2012, the executive committee including representatives from Aleut International Association, Gwich’in Council International, Norway and Kingdom of Denmark was mandated to identify models to relocate IPS and revise IPS Terms of Reference and Procedural Guidelines. In 2014, the IPS Board reached consensus on the revised documents... It has been important for the IPS Board to keep the independence of IPS. At the same time, the revision of the Terms of Reference has identified the need for clarification of the status of the IPS”

ALONA YEFIMENKO, IPS ADVISOR 1995-2020

IPS SUPPORTS ARCTIC INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ ORGANIZATIONS

The functions of the IPS are broad to ensure versatile support for PPs. The IPS:

- facilitates PPs’ participation in, and enhances their capacity to contribute to, the Arctic Council;

- helps with communication among PPs and between PPs and other subsidiary bodies of the Council;
- supports PPs' actions to maintain and promote the sustainable development of Indigenous Peoples' cultures;
- gathers and disseminates information on different forms of knowledge, including Traditional Knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, communicates information about the Council, etc.

As one of the capacity-building activities, the IPS offers internships for students and young professionals of the Arctic States. According to former IPS interns, Jennelle Doyle (2018), and Bobbie Jo Greenland-Morgan (2005), the internship was a great learning experience that has helped build their careers.

From the early years, the IPS has served as a center of communication among Arctic Indigenous Peoples' organizations, helping with cross-cultural communication. The IPS has lived through and adjusted to the changes that digitalization has brought. The IPS provided online meeting support from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, a factor that has sped up digital transformation and led to the adaptation of new technologies. Since then, most of the PP Caucuses – PPs' informal meetings – have taken place online. PPs have different support needs and the IPS activities are tailored to and guided by PPs. That's the case in the past and going forward.

"I feel that IPS is a necessary platform for PPs to facilitate contacts between Indigenous Peoples organizations themselves, but also with Arctic Council Member States."

HJALMAR DAHL, ICC GREENLAND PRESIDENT 2014-2022 AND CHAIR OF THE IPS BOARD 2021-2023

"The activities of the Secretariat are always guided by the needs of the Permanent Participants. It's important to provide a platform and it's something that the IPS has been good at over the decades. It's providing a platform to bring people from different parts of the planet together to have conversations."

JOHN CRUMP, ICC CANADA SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR, IPS EXECUTIVE SECRETARY 2002-2005

FUTURE OF INDIGENOUS COOPERATION IN THE ARCTIC

Some of the PPs' joint priorities are Indigenous youth engagement and Arctic Indigenous Peoples' cooperation. In 2020, PPs strengthened their Indigenous youth

engagement by establishing the PP Youth Network. The IPS has supported many PP youth activities, such as the PP Youth Arctic Council's 25th Anniversary Storytelling Initiative, for example by assisting with multimedia workshops and online meetings of the PP Youth Network. Youth engagement and capacity building contribute to the future Arctic Indigenous cooperation by training future leaders.

Throughout the years, the IPS, together with Indigenous organizations, has implemented various courses and training programs for Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic. "International Introductory Course: The Arctic Council and the Role of the Permanent Participants" in Moscow, Russia, in 2018; and a virtual training program "Cultural Documentation and Intellectual Property Management for Indigenous Peoples" in 2021 could serve as examples. IPS also assisted with other training initiatives, such as 2022-2023 International Workshop and Course on Indigenous Youth Leadership in Arendal, Norway and at the Harvard Kennedy School and Tufts University Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in Boston, USA, and other programs.

"It is up to the PPs to do the next step and see where they can take IPS. It is like taking it to the next level, which could strengthen Indigenous Peoples' cooperation in the Arctic.... There are so many opportunities, and in that context, the IPS perhaps could be the vehicle to take Indigenous Peoples' relations in the Arctic to the next stage and phase. Let's see how the structure can be used to ensure that our sisters and brothers, also on the Russian side, are not forgotten about, even though, at the moment it's difficult."

ELLE MERETE OMMA, HEAD OF EU UNIT OF SAAMI COUNCIL, IPS EXECUTIVE SECRETARY 2014-2017

"That pause has been detrimental to us in many ways, but it doesn't have to continue to be that way. We can find solutions and ways to continue to collaborate and have discussions with one another while also having respect and integrity."

DEENAALEE HODGDON, YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE OF ARCTIC ATHABASKAN COUNCIL

The Arctic Council Permanent Participants have expressed their commitment to continue working towards stronger participation of Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic Council. Throughout the years, PPs have worked to ensure that the IPS is strengthened and thrives in fulfilling its mandate to support PPs. The IPS has had an important role in facilitating Arctic Indigenous cooperation and that role will continue in the future. ●



TOP & LEFT: Youth participants in the 2022 International Workshop on Indigenous Youth Leadership in Arendal, Norway.
CREDIT: IPS

RIGHT: Chair of the IPS Board 2021-2023 Hjalmar Dahl, and the IPS staff, Executive Secretary Anna Degteva and Advisor Rosa-Måren Magga.
CREDIT: IPS

BOTTOM: ACS/IPS staff together.
CREDIT: ACS



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IPS interviewed several Arctic Indigenous Peoples representatives and former IPS staff for this piece. We sincerely thank interviewed people for their time and willingness to share their knowledge and expertise on Arctic Indigenous Peoples' cooperation and the Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat.

INTERVIEWS

Hjalmar Dahl,
3 April 2023

John Crump,
24 April 2023

Deenaalee Hodgdon,
27 April 2023

Elle Merete Omma,
2 May 2023

Alona Yefimenko,
2 May 2023

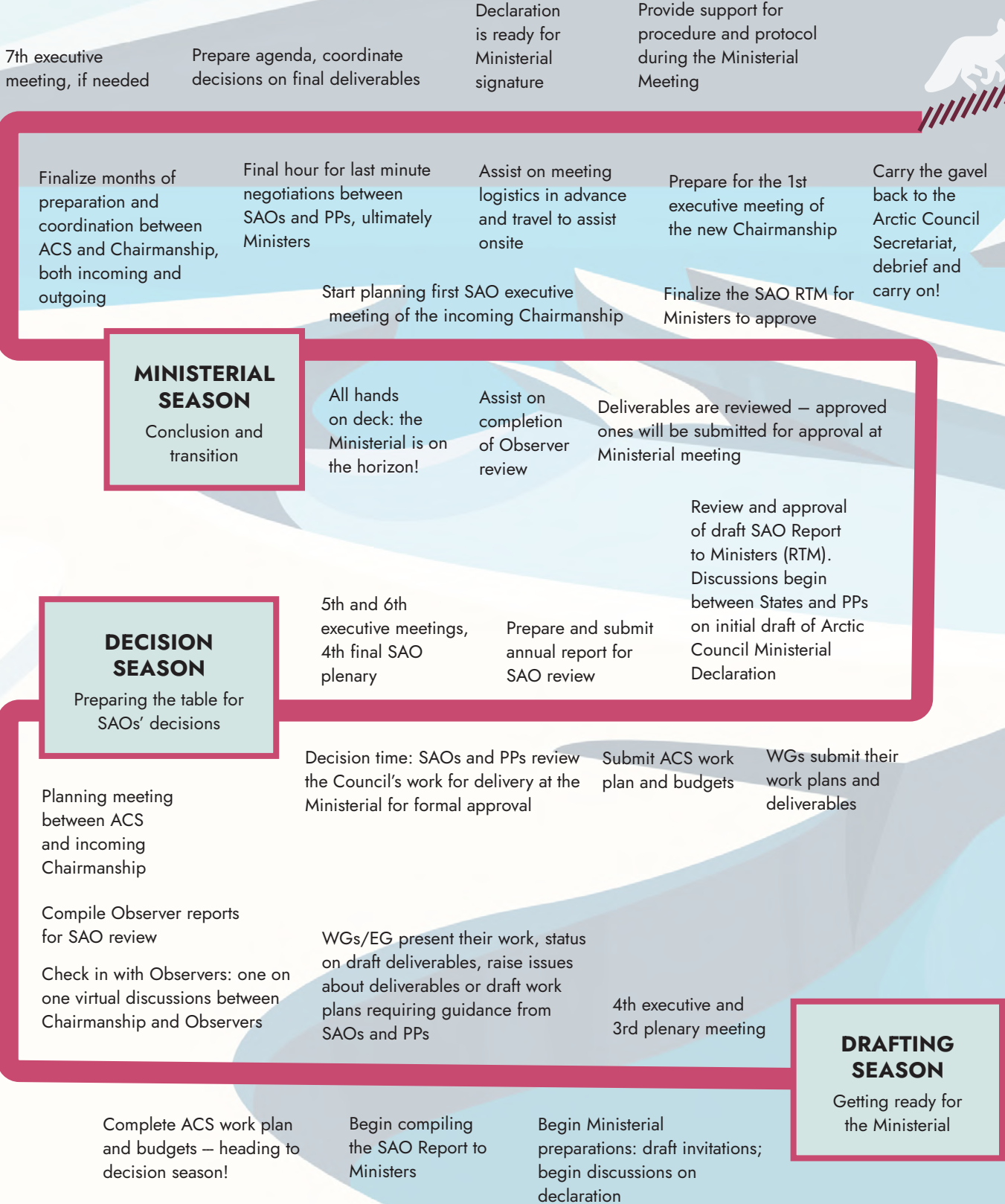


THE ARTICLE REFERENCES THE "CELEBRATING THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF IPS: BUILDING ON INDIGENOUS ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE ARCTIC COUNCIL." WORKSHOP REPORT PREPARED BY THE IPS IN 2014, THE STATEMENT MADE BY DANISH MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, SVEND AUKEN, WHICH WAS ANNEXED TO THE FOLLOWING 1993 REPORT: THE ARCTIC ENVIRONMENT: SECOND MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE, 16 SEPTEMBER 1993, NUUK, GREENLAND – THE NUUK DECLARATION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARCTIC; AND AN IPS INTERNSHIP WEBINAR HOSTED BY GWICH'IN COUNCIL INTERNATIONAL IN MARCH 2023.

THE 6 SEASONS OF A CHAIRMANSHIP

Each Arctic State chairs the Arctic Council for a period of two years, which begins and ends with a Ministerial meeting. The Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials (SAOC) and their Chairmanship team oversees the overall operations of the Arctic Council and address all Arctic Council decisions, priorities, activities and relationships.

The Secretariat is there to assist with institutional and procedural knowledge based on the rules and norms of the Council. Whatever the task, the SAOC can always count on the ACS through all six seasons of a Chairmanship.



START HERE!

Hit the ground running as a new Chairmanship begins



YEAR 1

Work with the Chair to coordinate and organize all Council and Chairmanship meetings

Share institutional and procedural knowledge with the new Chair team, ensuring smooth transition and start of new cycle

TRANSITION SEASON

Get new Chairmanship projects on the tracks

And here we go again!

SAOs and PPs decide on agenda of the Council, influencing priorities and outcomes for approval at the Ministerial meeting

Facilitate and ensure good flow of information between the Chair and all the Council's bodies, and vice versa

Coordinate the first of several meetings between the SAO Chair and the WGs and E

Prepare draft modalities for the new cycle's Observer review and reporting processes

First SAO executive meeting: identify items and draft an agenda, assist in logistics planning

PLANNING SEASON

The whole Council gets together

Decide plan for Arctic Council side events

Ensure follow-up on action items from the last Ministerial declaration

Co-develop calendar of Arctic Council side events

Provide updates, help with Council administration, organize thematic meetings

Thematic discussions on joint Chairmanship and WG priorities

SAOs and PPs provide guidance to subsidiary bodies

First Chairmanship priority event

Ensure Chairmanship priorities are shared with the entire Council

2nd executive and 1st plenary meeting

WGs/EG present their work plans, overall objectives for the next two years

Update on events and Council participation in external events

UPDATE SEASON

Checking in on progress

THE BIG SPRINT!

After a restful summer, it's time to begin scoping out the results for the Ministerial meeting and planning for the next cycle

Thematic discussions focusing on WG progress and advancement of Chairmanship priorities

3rd executive and 2nd plenary meeting, 2nd Chairmanship priority event

YEAR 2

Summer break! But first, plan for autumn

Everyone gives a status update: hints on potential deliverables for the next Ministerial

Prepare ACS annual report, submit to SAOs for their review



TWO SPECIAL INTERNSHIPS

The Arctic Council Secretariat (ACS) has been offering internships to students and early career professionals for the past decade. Kiira Keski-Nirva, one of the first interns, and Minetta Westerlund, the current intern, shared their insights about their experience working at the Secretariat.



KIIRA KESKI-NIRVA

From: Finland

Interned: 2013-2014

Kiira Keski-Nirva from Finland started her internship at the ACS in January 2013, just at a time when the temporary ACS ended its six-year term of serving three consecutive Nordic Chairmanships and a standing Secretariat for the Council was being set up. She had the opportunity to work on various interesting tasks related to the establishment of the Secretariat, as well as preparations for the Kiruna Ministerial meeting. Kiira appreciated the level of responsibility she was given as an intern and recalls that there was a lot of trust and opportunity for young people to gain professional confidence at the ACS. “I especially remember the time when I was sent to Oslo to coordinate the set up for a Task Force meeting. Nina Buvang Vaaja (at the time the head of the temporary Secretariat) was an excellent director who placed a lot of trust in her team.”

For Kiira, the internship at the ACS was especially interesting because she got to experience different working, governance and social cultures. One of the most memorable aspects was having the opportunity to see Indigenous Peoples in action at the Arctic Council, for example at the Kiruna Ministerial meeting. Kiira, who minored in Indigenous Studies, found it rewarding to see that shift from theory to practice. She completed her internship in 2014, finished her education in Communications and Indigenous Studies the same year, and was offered a work opportunity in Brussels, where she then moved.

Since then, eight interns have worked at the ACS. The team of five that Kiira worked with has grown into a team of 16 staff members. The offices have been relocated to accommodate everyone, and the Indigenous Peoples’ Secretariat and three of the Arctic Council Working Group secretariats have moved in under the same roof.

The current intern, Minetta Westerlund from Finland, moved to Tromsø to study Visual Anthropology. She became interested in Arctic issues when she did field-work with reindeer herders and sheep farmers on the outskirts of Tromsø, and luckily got an internship at the ACS when she was graduating. “The internship offered an exciting chance to work on Arctic issues and opportunities, with some of the most knowledgeable people from all over the Arctic,” she said. Despite starting her internship in the beginning of March 2022, just a few days before all Arctic Council activities were paused, she has still had an interesting and rewarding internship.

“Even if the job tasks have changed somewhat for many at the Secretariat, the team spirit and work morale have been high. My colleagues have deemed this

time as an opportunity to learn and explore, whether it is new ideas and formats for the Council, or development of personal skills. I have gotten to work on many exciting tasks with both the communications team and the administration team. Further in the spring, it will be intriguing to see what kind of tasks the Chairmanship transition process brings.”

Minetta will have the opportunity to experience the transition of Chairmanship from the Russian Federation to Norway in May. The last time Norway held the Chairmanship was from 2006-2009, so she feels privileged to participate in the transition process and the onset of the second Norwegian Chairship period.

According to Minetta, the Arctic Council’s unique structure and cooperation, which extends beyond Arctic peoples and States, are immensely valuable. She believes it will be fascinating to witness Norway’s leadership in this regard.

LOOKING FORWARD

Kiira Keski-Nirva, after some years of working with non-Arctic issues, got a job at WWF in 2022. She will be working with their Arctic Programme during the Norwegian Chairship. As WWF is an Observer to the Arctic Council, she is also working in an Arctic Council-related context. Working with Arctic issues again felt like returning home for Kiira, who recognized a clear link between her ACS internship and current job.

Minetta is uncertain about her future career path, but she is determined to continue working on Arctic issues. Her internship at the ACS provided her with the necessary tools, knowledge and mindset to pursue her passion.

It will be intriguing to look back in ten years, just like we did with Kiira, when the Secretariat celebrates its 20th anniversary. ●

“The internship offered an exciting chance to work on Arctic issues and opportunities, with some of the most knowledgeable people from all over the Arctic.”

MINETTA WESTERLUND



**MINETTA
WESTERLUND**

Author

From: Finland

Interned: 2022-2023

THE SECRETARIAT IN STATS

The Secretariat supports the Chairmanship in the daily operations of the Arctic Council, and maintains the Council's legacy, procedures and practices.

How we're organized:

DIRECTOR

CHAIRMANSHIP SUPPORT

- Advice and guidance
- Transitioning Chairmanships
- Meeting support
- Cooperation with external bodies
- Observer review and reporting
- Secretariat review
- Archiving
- Russian language services
- Coordination with Working Groups
- The biannual Senior Arctic Officials Report to Ministers

ADMINISTRATION

- Human resources
- Financial management
- Staff recruitment, assessment, development and welfare
- Information technology
- Budget and financial contributions

COMMUNICATIONS

- Media relations
- Content development
- Social media management
- Internal communications
- Branding
- Websites, document archiving and project tracking
- Representing the Arctic Council

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' SECRETARIAT

- Facilitating Permanent Participants' work in the Arctic Council
- Capacity-building, fundraising and youth activities
- Communications and outreach
- Representing the IPS
- Budgets and finances

ACAP AND EPPR SECRETARIATS

- Supporting the WGs' Chair and Heads of Delegation
- Coordinating work and meetings
- Document development
- Communications and outreach
- Administration

SECONDMENTS FROM STATE GOVERNMENTS

The Secretariat in meetings

We've organized over a dozen SAO plenary meetings since our creation, from Alaska to Iceland to Siberia.

Canada: Whitehorse, Yellowknife

US: Anchorage, Fairbanks, Portland (Maine), Juneau

Finland: Oulu, Levi, Rovaniemi, Ruka

Iceland: Hveragerði, The first virtual meetings!

Russian Federation: Salekhard

The Secretariat in snacks

Last year, the Arctic Council Secretariat was powered by:



28 KILOGRAMS OF COFFEE BEANS



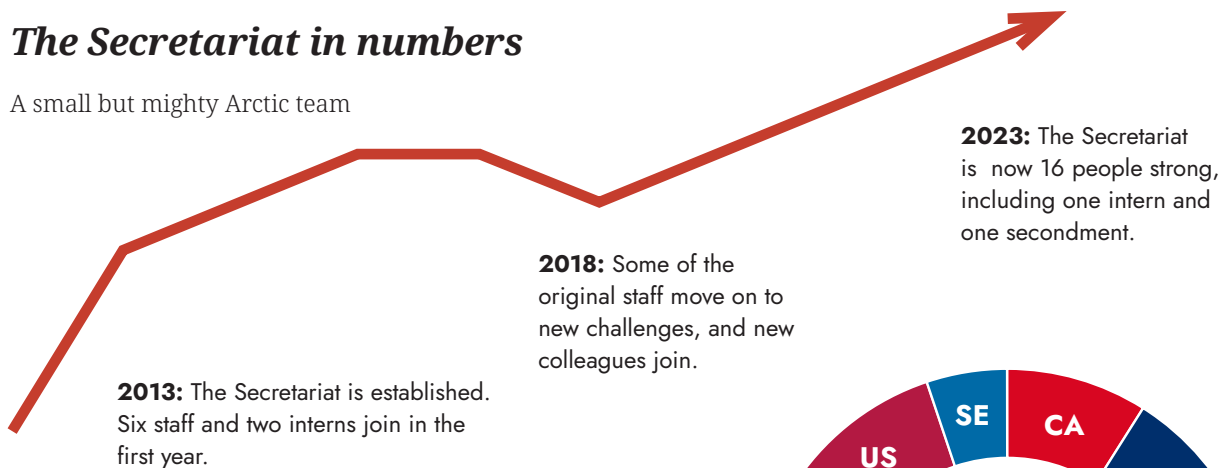
22 CAKES



SHOCKING AMOUNTS OF CANDY

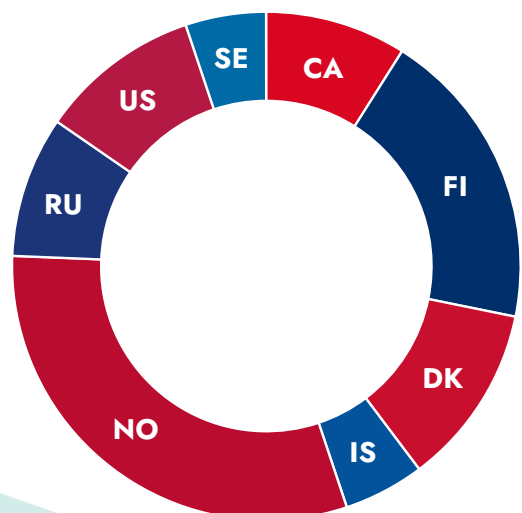
The Secretariat in numbers

A small but mighty Arctic team



The Secretariat by state

All staff are citizens of at least one of the eight Arctic States. Since the Secretariat's founding, we've had staff, interns or secondments from every Arctic State.



SECRETARIATS WITHIN THE SECRETARIAT

The ways in which different Working Group secretariats are organized are diverse. Two out of the six Arctic Council Working Group secretariats are part of the Arctic Council Secretariat (ACS). How did that happen, what developments have taken place over the past ten years, and where do these secretariats stand now? Let's take a look.

**NINA
ÅGREN
&
KSENIIA
IARTCEVA**
Authors

The Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP) and Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR) Working Group Executive Secretaries are part of the ACS team, and support and facilitate the work of their respective groups from the Tromsø office. Before 2014, the secretarial functions rotated with the chairing State, as they did for the Arctic Council in general.

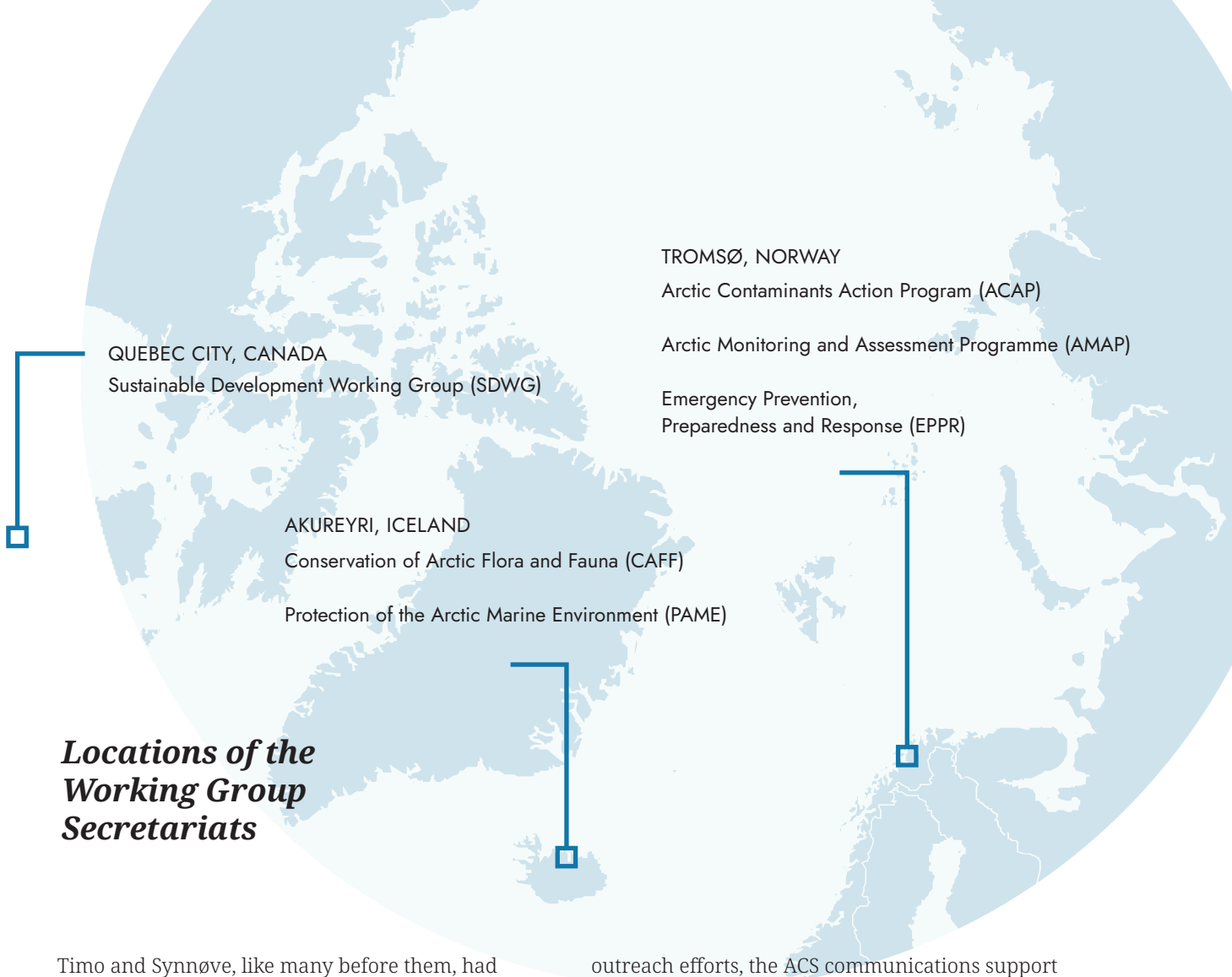
While EPPR was established under the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy in 1991, ACAP came into the picture originally as an Arctic Council Action Plan to Eliminate Pollution of the Arctic adopted in 2000. Six years later it developed into the Arctic Contaminants Action Program, or the ACAP Working Group as we know it today. So, while both Working Groups (WGs) have a history of operating without a standing secretariat, in the case of EPPR, the permanent secretariat has been serving the group for a short period of its existence.

As the mandates, structure and activities of the Working Groups developed over the years, the idea of building up a stable institutional memory, including archives, and a resilient long-term administrative structure persisted. The establishment of the ACS in 2013 created an opportunity for the WGs to secure continuous administrative and secretarial support, which was strongly encouraged by the WGs and their Chairs, who saw the benefits of a permanent solution.

TRANSITION

When establishing the position of Executive Secretary for ACAP and EPPR at the ACS, the idea was that one person would manage both WGs with support from the ACS structure. In 2014, Patti Bruns was hired as the Executive Secretary for both ACAP and EPPR. When asked how she would foremost describe her experience, the first things on the list are the people, the Arctic community and the momentum the WGs had together throughout the years she served at the ACS.

During her first year as ACAP/EPPR Executive Secretary, Patti worked hand in hand with Jaakko Henttonen and Ole Kristian Bjerkmø, as well as with Timo Seppälä and Synnøve Lunde, the ACAP and EPPR Chairs and Executive Secretaries at the time, seasoned professionals who knew the WGs inside out. "I remember my first meetings very well – I had no idea of what the expectations were. But having people who had been there for a long time, who could really walk me through those first meetings in a supportive way was very handy," recollected Patti.



QUEBEC CITY, CANADA
Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG)

AKUREYRI, ICELAND
Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF)
Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME)

TROMSØ, NORWAY
Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP)
Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP)
Emergency Prevention,
Preparedness and Response (EPPR)

Locations of the Working Group Secretariats

Timo and Synnøve, like many before them, had provided administrative support to ACAP and EPPR on top of having full-time jobs and being experts in their respective WGs. So, this transition also freed the expert capacity within the WGs. “In many ways that was a great time for the Arctic Council when the ACS started and so much more professionalism came to replace the ad-hoc secretariats. It is one thing to be a chemicals management expert and quite another to be a good secretariat!” said Timo.

SHARING AN EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

At the beginning of the process, a lot of thought was put into the development of standard agendas, streamlined reporting, records of decision, as well as giving the documents a common look and feel. Another big task was to create a well-functioning document management and archiving system that would help build and maintain the WGs’ institutional memory. “The archives resided with the chairing state before the permanent Secretariat, and would remain there, while a new Chair would establish their own system,” noted Ole Kristian, looking back to earlier days. These efforts greatly benefited from being part of the ACS, and both WGs approved the parameters and structure that were put into place. When the WGs reinvigorated and advanced their communication and

outreach efforts, the ACS communications support was of immense help.

Another focus was on strengthening internal communication within the larger Arctic Council family. During that time, “considerable effort was put into representing ACAP and EPPR at the Senior Arctic Officials’ (SAO) level, and Patti played an important role in facilitating information exchange between ACAP and EPPR and the Arctic Council Chairmanship, SAOs, Permanent Participants, other Working Groups and the Secretariat,” added Timo.

Between 2014-2019, ACAP and EPPR worked closely together and initiated some processes in parallel due to the shared Executive Secretary. For example, both WGs had their brands redesigned, which resulted in new matching visual identities. At the same time, collaboration with other subsidiary bodies of the Arctic Council became a top priority. As an example, during these years, all six WGs jointly drafted a milestone document for collaboration - the Common Operating Guidelines.

SPLIT IN TWO

All these developments helped to strengthen the WGs’ capacity, enabling ACAP and EPPR to be more



LEFT: Nina Ågren (EPPR) and Kseniia Iartceva (ACAP).

CREDIT: VYACHESLAV VIKTOROV

RIGHT: Patti Bruns (EPPR/ACAP).

CREDIT: LINNEA NORDSTROM / ARCTIC COUNCIL SECRETARIAT



ambitious and expand their activities, while meeting the existing demands. As years went by and the work advanced both within the groups, as well as in cooperation with all the other WGs, it became obvious that one person was not enough to serve two groups. “One of the challenges was the meeting schedule, as arranging two WG meetings at the same time with a shared Executive Secretary was impossible,” recalled Ole Kristian. Besides, ACAP and EPPR have always had very distinct personalities and ways of working due to the differences in the nature of the mandates.

Therefore, when Patti moved on to new Arctic adventures in 2019, SAOs agreed to split the position in two. This started a new era for ACAP and EPPR in their organizational culture. Kseniia Iartceva was hired as the ACAP Executive Secretary in 2019, and Nina Ågren as EPPR Executive Secretary in 2020, after almost a year in an interim role.

The establishment of two WG secretariats instead of one coincided with a new phase of organizational development within ACAP and EPPR. One of the main tasks for both new Executive Secretaries was to help coordinate and facilitate growing intersessional work and to further strengthen institutional practices. In ACAP, for example, this included updating and synchronizing its Expert Groups’ mandates, as well as reviewing, reinforcing and developing some of the group’s internal documents. In EPPR, advancing administration resulted in, for example, enhanced internal governance and communications structures, in the form of a creation of a new executive leadership group and new ways of sharing information within the WG.

It goes without saying that having one dedicated full-time position to support the work

of one WG has made a difference. With more time for intersessional work, ACAP and EPPR Executive Secretaries became more involved in project-related activities. Their capacity to work with experts within their respective WG to develop relevant communication content and larger outreach campaigns has also been strengthened.

With the COVID-19 pandemic breaking out at the beginning of 2020, the timing for splitting one secretariat into two could not have been better. Given the nature of the work during the following two years, covering the work for two groups would have been impossible for one person. The adjustments needed to accommodate the growing number of online meetings and WG events, as well as new needs for technical and administrative support, such as EPPR’s shift to virtual exercises during the pandemic.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

This evolution of the Secretariats has made it possible for the Working Groups to grow, both in activity level, and as a part of the Council’s subsidiary bodies. With more resources to dedicate to enhancing communications efforts, cross-cutting collaboration among all the WGs, historical project tracking, development of internal structures, and exploring funding solutions, a steady and more robust administration has proved its worth. While some fundamental core tasks rarely change in their nature, ACAP and EPPR Executive Secretaries are looking forward to continuing finding ways, with the help of the rest of the ACS team, to support the evolving activities of the WGs in the best way possible. ●

INTRODUCING THE DIRECTORS

MAGNÚS JÓHANNESSON

Magnús Jóhannesson was no stranger to building something from scratch when he was appointed as the first Director of the Arctic Council Secretariat to start work in February 2013. Twenty years earlier, he'd taken on a similar task in the Icelandic Ministry for the Environment. By the time he moved from Reykjavik to Tromsø, he had turned an office with one minister and six employees into a full-grown ministry with 40 employees. He had educated his fellow Icelanders on environmental issues and pushed for international action on marine pollution issues as a former Maritime Director in Iceland. But after two decades as Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Magnús was ready for a new challenge.

When he heard that the Arctic Council had decided to establish a standing Secretariat, it caught his interest at once. He was of course familiar with the work of the Council from his time in the Ministry. He'd witnessed how a milestone report, AMAP's Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, which was released during the first Icelandic Chairmanship of the Council in 2004, had brought Arctic climate issues to a global agenda. This pioneering work on understanding and raising awareness on the effects of climate change in the high latitudes was, he says today, one reason why he was open to this professional change.

But Magnús was also aware that it had taken the Council 16 years to come to a consensus on establishing a standing secretariat. "I thought this would be an interesting job, a challenge to make it happen, to make it a success – and I have always thrived on a challenge. I knew we had to deliver, to prove the value of a permanent secretariat to those that were still skeptical," he said.

Without knowing much about the city, Magnús moved to Tromsø in February 2013. Coming from a small fishing village in Iceland, he was familiar with cold, dark winters, but not many months passed until he was impressed by the location, the weather (it takes an Icelander to be impressed with that) and the community. "I never got bored there," he recalled.

Indeed, there was little time for Magnús to get bored. The ACS was set to become operational on 1 June, in time for the onset of the Canadian Chairmanship. By that deadline, the Secretariat needed to have a legal entity – and staff. "I really had time against me," said Magnus. Fortunately, his preliminary office in the Norwegian Polar Institute was right next door to the temporary Arctic Council Secretariat and he was able to draw on the expertise of its team. "I could ask Nina, André and Linnea anything and they were always very nice and helpful."



**MAGNÚS
JÓHANNESSON**

From: Iceland

Director: 2013-2017

“Try to meet people in person, listen to them, their views and expectations. Then help them to live up to their expectations to the extent possible for you.”

Magnús knew that one key to the ACS's success would be to recruit the right people. And so, not long after, the three staff members of the temporary Secretariat joined Magnús in his effort to establish a more permanent home for the Council's administrative tasks.

Another key to making the ACS successful was building trust with the Arctic Council family. “I have a simple formula: First of all, try to meet people in person, listen to them, their views and expectations. Then, help them to live up to their expectations to the extent possible for you.”

In addition, he also had his own expectations to live up to. His goal was that the ACS would be responsible for as much as possible. “Everything in terms of services the ACS could provide, we should also provide,” he stated. Magnús advocated for the integration of the secretariats for EPPR and ACAP into the ACS. He saw a big task in enhancing the Council's communications capacities. And not least, he wanted the ACS to assist the Chairmanship in every way possible.

By the time Magnús' four-year term and eight months ended, he'd managed to establish yet another functional office: a strong, growing team and a reliable service-provider for the Council. He had also managed to convince the Arctic Council members to develop a long-term strategy for the Council. And while he moved back to Reykjavik, he remained in the Arctic Council family. The second Icelandic Chairmanship term (2019-2021) was approaching, and the Foreign Ministry reached out to Magnús, asking him to join the team as a consultant. He did, spending another four years working on Arctic issues as special advisor to the Icelandic Chairmanship team and coordinator of the Council's marine litter and plastics efforts.

Today, 10 years after Magnús took on the task to establish the ACS, he serves as the Chair of the Icelandic Recycling Board, heading a committee for marine planning in the Western and Eastern fjords of Iceland.

NINA BUVANG VAAJA

When Nina Buvang Vaaja's term as ACS Director ended in August 2021, she had served the Arctic Council for 12 years. Although only four of those were as Director, her role in the Secretariat goes beyond the inception of the standing Arctic Council Secretariat itself and began at the end of the Norwegian Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2009.

Nina had worked at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a few years – in both Murmansk and Rome – when the Council's Ministerial meeting in Tromsø in 2009 was approaching. She volunteered to help as she was very interested in Arctic affairs, but she knew little about the temporary Arctic Council Secretariat that had been established in Tromsø to serve the three consecutive Nordic country chairmanships: Norway, the Kingdom of Denmark and Sweden.

Yet, when the position as leader of the temporary Secretariat was advertised, she applied and got the job. Nina and her family moved back to Tromsø, their hometown, in August 2009. Her first task was to start working with the Danish Chairmanship – and to follow the discussions that soon would lead to the establishment of a standing Arctic Council Secretariat. Nina closely followed this process as secretary of the Task Force for Institutional Issues (see more info in "The secretariat question – and its long-winded answer"). And once the ACS was formally established and operational, she stayed on as its Deputy Director.

Together with the ACS' first Director, Magnús Jóhannesson, the duo was – brick by brick – building a foundation for the Secretariat. One of the most important building blocks that was needed was trust. Trust from the Arctic States, the Indigenous Permanent Participants, the Council's Working Groups and Observers that the ACS would deliver and not overstep its competencies. "There's nothing more important for the ACS than to be credible, trustworthy and to be perceived as a common good to the Arctic Council," said Nina.

This has been her guiding principle, also when she stepped up the ladder and became the ACS Director in 2017. Team spirit was another. Nina fostered service-mindedness and the drive to help each other at all times, and these are traits that she reflects herself. People who have worked closely with Nina over the years consider her loyal, competent and kind, with a great sense of humor.

Nina left the ACS with a strong legacy. In her own words: "I think I'm leaving the Secretariat in a good position to move into the future and to do big things." A textbook example of Scandinavian modesty (she laughed as this is pointed out and added: "that will never change"). For everyone who knows Nina and her work, it's clear: she was the powerhouse behind the scenes. The reputation of the ACS within the Council – and beyond – is proof of her hard work and something the ACS team continues to safeguard.



**NINA BUVANG
VAAJA**

From: Norway

Director: 2017-2021

“I think I’m leaving the Secretariat in a good position to move into the future and to do big things.”



MATHIEU PARKER

From: Canada

Director: 2021-Current

MATHIEU PARKER

Since the end of September 2021, Mathieu Parker has been the third Director of the Arctic Council Secretariat (ACS). With over two decades of prior experience within the Government of Canada, Mathieu spent his last five years prior to joining the ACS in Arctic Canada working first as Director General, and subsequently as Vice-President of Pan-Territorial Operations for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor) in Iqaluit, Nunavut.

Back in 2017, Mathieu and his family took a leap of faith and embarked on a 2000 kilometer move North from the Ottawa region to Iqaluit, Nunavut. As Head of Operations for CanNor, he was hoping to experience “policy-making and program delivery on the ground,” as he called it.

Mathieu described his years in Nunavut as eye-opening. They broadened his perspective on both Arctic socio-economic and environmental issues at large, as well as Indigenous realities and the lingering impacts of past federal policies. One could say his experiences have served as a springboard to cross the Atlantic for his new job. “I am a very strong believer in the role that the Council has in the circumpolar North and what it represents, so when the Director’s position came up, I immediately knew it was an opportunity I couldn’t pass up; both for myself professionally, but also for my family as a whole.”

While the Arctic Council itself was celebrating its 25th anniversary the very week that Mathieu and his family arrived in Tromsø in September 2021, the Secretariat in comparison remains a relatively young organization which continues to face a number of challenges and growing pains. And indeed, Mathieu’s first 1.5 years in the Director’s role have been anything but ordinary; as the Council’s official activities have been paused for the first time in its history; prompting the ACS to have to return to its core mandate and constituting documents for guidance in carving a way forward in these unprecedented times.

“This past year has been a unique one in many regards, as our governing documents were never designed with this type of scenario in mind. From an early point, we really had to go back and reflect on how we could ensure that we approached the situation in line with the spirit and intent of our original mandate; which is first and foremost one of impartiality, working in the best interest of the Council as a whole.”

And while this pause has translated into a significant disruption to some of its traditional functions such as meeting support and communications, it has also

required the ACS to play a unique intermediary role between the outgoing Russian and incoming Norwegian chairmanships. As a neutral body of the Council, the Secretariat has been repeatedly called upon to provide strategic, impartial advice and support to both the outgoing and incoming Chairs in order to help facilitate the transition process.

Thankfully, Mathieu is no stranger to change and crisis management, and his previous experience in this regard has played heavily in how he has navigated these unprecedented times. “I regard our role here at the ACS as being very similar to that of other national or international civil servants. In that context, I have found myself on several occasions reflecting back on a famous quote which I think all Canadian public servants have heard many times over, which is that your ultimate role as a public servant is that of providing ‘fearless advice, and loyal implementation’, while always working with the best interest of the organization as a whole in mind, of course. And truly, I believe this foundational principle rings true regardless of whether you are advising a Minister on funding options for a high-profile project in the Canadian Arctic, or providing advice to the Chairmanship of an international body such as the Arctic Council on the best approach for presenting and reaching consensus on a given proposal.”

Without a doubt, this past year and a half has been challenging and stressful for all ACS staff, and Mathieu is extremely thankful for the professionalism, dedication and resilience that all have demonstrated during these times. And he remains confident that the ACS will only come out of this experience stronger. Looking back at his first 1.5 years on the job, Mathieu is also extremely grateful to his predecessors, whose groundwork laid the solid foundations which have allowed the ACS to weather this storm until now, and will hopefully allow it to continue to grow and prosper moving forward.

“[We had to approach the situation] with the spirit and intent of our original mandate; which is first and foremost one of impartiality, working in the best interest of the Council as a whole.”

TREASURE HUNT THROUGH THE ARCTIC COUNCIL SECRETARIAT



CARVED STONE STATUE

Rock carving in grey showing a woman playing a traditional drum. Brought to Tromsø from the Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat office in Copenhagen.

Creator unknown, 1998

THE ARCTIC COUNCIL GAVEL

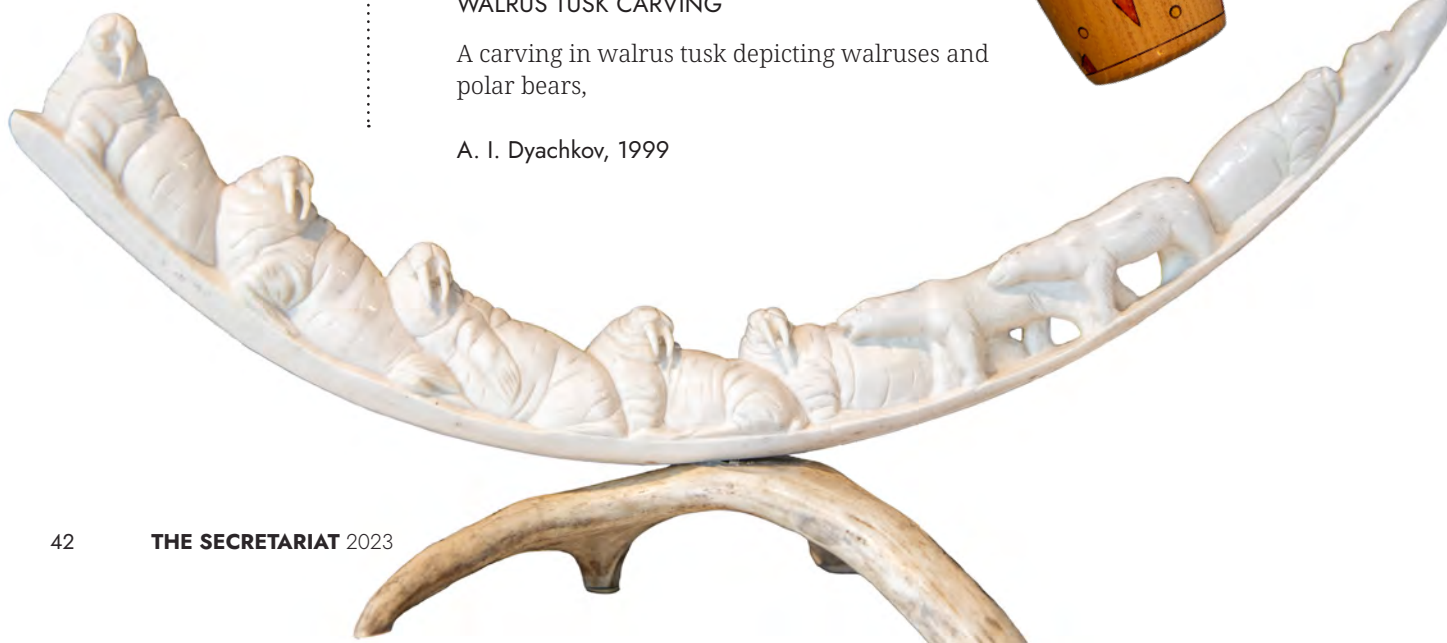
Named "Return", the gavel is a piece of art created by Yukon-based Ken Anderson. Inspired by the Arctic region and its peoples, the gavel is made of birch, one of the most prevalent types of wood in the circumpolar Arctic. With the head of a raven and salmon swimming in opposite directions along the handle, the gavel symbolizes the comings and goings of Arctic Council Chairmanships. It was presented during the second Canadian Chairmanship by Yukon Premier Darrel Pasloski to Honorable Minister Leona Aglukkaq, then-Chair of the Arctic Council, in 2013. Today, it holds a central role in the Chairmanship cycle as it marks the end and the beginning of a Chairmanship.



WALRUS TUSK CARVING

A carving in walrus tusk depicting walruses and polar bears,

A. I. Dyachkov, 1999



A peek at the physical archives and artwork that can be found in our Tromsø office



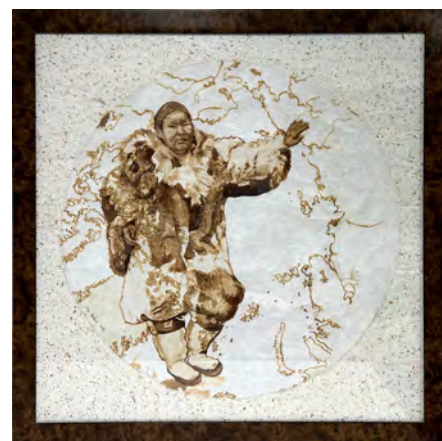
The original wooden ceremonial gavel is of unknown origin and was used prior to the 2013 Arctic Council Ministerial meeting.



Drum dancer created by Louie Makituq, Gjoa Haven, Canada, ca. 2018



Fisherman created by John Keknek, Gjoa Haven, Canada, ca. 2018



PAINTINGS

Indigenous woman dancing over a map and Indigenous woman speaking at a conference. Created by Naja Abelsen, 1993

DRUM DANCER AND FISHERMAN FIGURINES

Two figurines, one with a man playing a drum with a stick made of bone and another with a fisherman carrying fishing equipment made of bone and hide. The figurines are carved in stone and resemble two Indigenous figures with tools and drums made from bone of unknown origin. They were a gift to the ACS from Canada presented by the Canadian Embassy in Oslo on the occasion of the ACS moving to a new office.

THE ARCTIC COUNCIL SECRETARIAT VISITORS' LOGBOOK

Some of the key visitors to the Secretariat over the years

Each year, the Arctic Council Secretariat has the pleasure of welcoming a range of visitors to its premises in Tromsø. Visitors have included students, journalists, Observer representatives, ambassadors, ministers and more. In this log book, we'll take a look at visits from ministers to royals.

2023

TOP PHOTO, CENTER FRONT: Anniken Huitfeldt, Foreign Minister, Norway

BOTTOM PHOTO, LEFT: Thórdís Kolbrún Reykjaförð Gylfadóttir, Foreign Minister, Iceland

2023



2020



2020
LEFT: Jeppe Kofod,
Foreign Minister,
Kingdom of Denmark

CENTER: Ine Marie Eriksen Søreide,
Foreign Minister,
Norway

Matilda Ernkrans,
Minister for Research,
Sweden

2019

Ine Marie Eriksen Søreide, Foreign Minister, Norway (with delegation)

2017

CENTER: Karen Ellemann, Minister of Equal Opportunities and Nordic Cooperation, Kingdom of Denmark

2016

Timo Soini, Foreign Minister, Finland (with delegation)

Ragnheiður Elín Árnadóttir, Minister for Industry and Commerce, Iceland

Kristján Þór Júlíusson, Minister for Nordic Cooperation, Iceland

2015

LEFT: Martin Lidegaard, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Denmark

2017



2015



2014

LEFT: Børge Brende,
Minister of Foreign
Affairs, Norway

**H.S.H. Prince Albert II
of Monaco**

Kristina Persson,
Minister for Strategic
Development and
Nordic Cooperation,
Sweden

2014



2013

**His Majesty King Karl
XVI Gustaf and Queen
Silvia of Sweden**

**His Majesty King
Harald V and Queen
Sonja of Norway**

HOST COUNTRY
AGREEMENT
SIGNING:

**FROM LEFT TO
RIGHT: Carl Bildt,**
Foreign Minister,
Sweden and the
outgoing chair of the
Arctic Council

Espen Barth Eide,
Foreign Minister,
Norway;

Leona Aglukkaq,
Regional Minister for
the North, Minister
of the Environment,
Minister of
the Canadian
Northern Economic
Development Agency
and Minister for the
Arctic Council, Canada

2013



- ANSWERS:
1. The Barents, Kara, Laptev, East Siberian, Chukchi, Beaufort, and Greenland seas. Some oceanographers also include the Bering, White, and Norwegian seas.
 2. Arctic tern
 3. Wooden maps of the Greenlandic coastline
 4. Reykjavik
 5. See a map of languages at: site.uit.no/sagasatallam/in/language-map
 6. Canada
 7. Svalbard, Norway
 8. Pallas, Finnish Lapland
 9. The tip of the tongue

TEST YOUR ARCTIC KNOWLEDGE

Quizzes have a strong tradition at ACS team events. Do you know all the answers?

1. Name at least five marginal seas of the Arctic Ocean.

2. Which Arctic bird is the migration champion? Over its lifetime, it flies a distance equal to three return trips to the moon on average.



3. What are these?

4. What city is the northernmost capital in the world?

5. Name at least 5 Indigenous languages spoken by members of the Arctic Council Permanent Participant organizations.

6. Which Arctic State has the most extensive coastline?

7. Where in the Arctic can you find the Global Seed Vault?

8. According to the WMO, the cleanest air for breathing can be found in this part of the Arctic. Where?

9. Many peoples who eat reindeer and caribou around the Arctic utilize almost every part of the animal for food, but refrain from eating this part. What is it?



← Check your answers!

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