

Speech by Nadine Kochuten
Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting

The Aleut people have inhabited the Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian, Pribilof and Commander islands that stretch for thousands of miles from Alaska to Russia. This is the place where we have always lived.

Our culture is based on the ocean. Unangax, which is what we call ourselves in our own language, means, the people of the sea. What happens in the ocean has a direct effect on our communities and our people. We are concerned about the changes that are happening right now. These changes are environmental and they are also social. As the indigenous people of this region, we welcome the dialogue that we are having here today. Fishing, both commercial and subsistence, are synonymous in our region.

Shipping along the Great North Circle Route takes place in our backyard. Ocean acidification, pollution, black carbon, potential from spills of heavy fuel oils and the range shift of species pose serious threats to our culture, our environment and our way of life.

Thank you to the ministers for this dialogue. We appreciate the opportunity to share our knowledge and also to engage with experts from many backgrounds. We strongly believe that communication and collaboration with Indigenous knowledge (IK) holders is imperative to this dialogue. Without looking at the Indigenous people and our culture as part of the ecosystem, we are not looking at the whole ecosystem.

Aleut International Association supports and encourages the incorporation of IK with science to bring forward a holistic view of the place where we live. Further, this collaborative approach will allow us to engage in an important dialogue about the rapid environmental changes being felt within our communities and what this means for Aleut people now and in the future.