

**Remarks by Bill Erasmus, International Chair
Arctic Athabaskan Council
Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting
Fairbanks, Alaska, 2017**

Good Evening. My name is Bill Erasmus. I live in Yellowknife, NWT, Canada. I'm the International Chair of the Arctic Athabaskan Council, whose Members include northern Athabaskan peoples in Alaska and Canada. With me are Chief Gary Harrison, Chief Michael Stickman, Chief PJ Simon, Faye Ewan, and Bridget Larocque.

I only have a few minutes so I'll go straight into two important issues: climate change and economic sustainability. I'll end with a few comments about AAC.

A key Arctic Council achievement kicking off the US Chairmanship was the Framework for Action on

Enhanced Black Carbon and Methane Emissions Reductions. This voluntary agreement marked the first time that Arctic States formally agreed to work together to mitigate climate change, and aims to exchange best practices and enhance regional action to reduce emissions. The report of the first Expert Group on Black Carbon and Methane that was adopted today, offers recommendations on concrete measures to implement the Framework and reduce emissions from key sectors like diesel and oil and gas venting and flaring. Indigenous peoples of the North are counting on action by the leaders around the table today to take those recommendations forward.

You are sending a hugely important political message—that climate change mitigation can be organized regionally as well as globally. The Finnish Chair has a great opportunity and responsibility during its chairmanship to promote effective implementation of the framework agreement.

In order to ensure health and well-being in the Arctic, we must balance environmental protection with economic sustainability. With this in mind we applaud the incoming Finnish Chairmanship and work-plan, which includes cooperation on education, meteorological cooperation, telecommunications and environmental protection. AAC will strive to contribute meaningfully

into these processes. AAC looks forward to engaging in the Arctic Environmental Impact Assessment, Arctic Energy Summit and Teacher Education for Diversity and Equality in the Arctic.

Please let me remind you that the culture of Athabaskan peoples reflects the land and all that it gives. We are connected to the land, it is who we are. Climate change in the Arctic is not just an environmental issue it is a matter of culture and our rights to exist as Indigenous peoples. Please, let us work cooperatively to find the way forward and the right balance.

My final word is about AAC. This Ministerial Meeting marks one full circle for AAC's involvement within the Arctic Council family. It's been sixteen years since we were first welcomed into the Arctic Council. In that time we have collaborated a great deal with Arctic States and Permanent Participants regarding circumpolar relations and geopolitics in general. We are all very much connected. Let us respect each other and continue our international cooperation to protect our Arctic for future generations.