

FORGING ARCTIC COUNCIL KNOWLEDGE PARTNERSHIPS TO ADVANCE ARCTIC'S FUTURE

STATEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL ARCTIC SOCIAL SCIENCES ASSOCIATION (IASSA)

Dear Ministers,
Dear Permanent Participant Heads of Delegations,
Dear Observers,
Dear Guests,

The International Arctic Social Sciences Association (IASSA), which celebrated its 30th anniversary last year, brings together over 700 social sciences, humanities and health sciences scholars who work in the Arctic. Social sciences research has an important contribution to understanding complex processes of environmental and social change in the Arctic. Our members work to inform and advance public policy and serve an important role in implementing sustainable development agenda across Arctic jurisdictions and communities that you represent.

Social, economic and cultural transformations in the Arctic are happening at a rapid pace, and, perhaps, are more dramatic than the change in the environment. Humans and social systems are critically important at both ends of the environmental change processes: they are often a driving force behind them and, at the same time, the main recipient of their impacts, to which people have to adapt. The nature of social-ecological systems is such that changes in the natural environment cannot be examined and understood in isolation from social dynamics in arctic communities. Thus, social scientists work together with natural sciences and Indigenous Peoples across disciplines, regions and knowledge systems to improve our shared understanding of the New Arctic.

Arctic residents, in particular the Indigenous Peoples, have special relationship and unique, grounded in generational experiences, understanding of the Arctic environment, socioeconomic systems and human-environment relations. Indigenous Knowledge provides a foundation for individual and collective well-being of past, present, and future generations of Arctic Indigenous Peoples. This knowledge system holds inherent value and methodologies, functions and validation processes. Indigenous Knowledge is key to accurate interpretation of dynamics in the natural and social systems in the Arctic. And it is clear now that science and policy that is not inclusive of the Indigenous Knowledge cannot be considered adequate to address Arctic needs.

Dramatic social, economic and cultural change in the Arctic has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. More than half a million Arctic residents to date have been diagnosed and nearly 10,000 died because of the disease. The pandemic also impacted science operations in the Arctic. This 'pause', however, has given us an opportunity to reflect on the current state and the future of Arctic science and move towards a more resilient, thus equitable, coordinated, safe and locally-embedded Arctic research enterprise. Local capacity building, IK engagement and training of the new generation of scholars will become our common priority past the pandemic.

IASSA is thrilled to be an active science observer to the Arctic Council. IASSA members participate in projects across multiple Arctic Council Working Groups. We are especially proud of our successful collaboration with the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG), where we co-led or contributed to such Icelandic Chairmanship projects as Gender in the Arctic, ECONOR-Economy of the North, and Arctic Resilience Forum, to name just a few. We are also happy to announce the establishment of the IASSA-IASC Fellowship in the SDWG that would facilitate the work of one or two early career scholars with the SDWG secretariat.

IASSA's broad involvement with the AC is a part of our commitment to fostering science diplomacy in the Arctic, and as an organization specifically mentioned in the Arctic Science Cooperation Agreement, we call on the Arctic states to ensure its speedy and full implementation.

We are grateful to the Icelandic chairmanship for tremendous work with AC observer organizations and our meaningful engagements in the work of the Council despite the COVID-19 limitations. We always felt welcome and heard, whether gathered in Iceland or at computer screens. IASSA is excited to continue and expand our engagement with the Arctic Council and Working Groups under the Russian Chairmanship, and invites to participate in the International Congress of Arctic Social Sciences (ICASS X) this June, which will be the first major science event hosted by Russia as the Arctic Council Chair.

Thank you very much!

Andrey N. Petrov, PhD
IASSA President