

Arctic Council
Deputy Ministers' meeting on May 27, 2010
Ambassador Hannu Halinen
SAO - Finland

EMERGING CHALLENGES IN THE ARCTIC

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to join those before me in stating that the Arctic Council is the pre-eminent and principal international and intergovernmental forum for consideration of Arctic policies. The unique feature of the Council is the Permanent Participants - the six representatives of the Indigenous peoples, side by side with the 8 government members. Unlike the Antarctic, the Arctic is inhabited with some 4 million people, some of them having been there over thousands of years. Therefore, the full participation of the Indigenous peoples in the AC – including its WG's – should be our self-evident goal.

The Working Groups – as well as Task Forces – are the core – the substance – of our activities. Remarkable achievements can be demonstrated as outcome of their deliberations. They form the platform for the existence of the AC, the awareness, the visibility, the “brand” of the AC is so far based upon the work of the WG's.

The funding of the activities of the WG's should be on a more solid basis. We fully agree with our Danish Chair on expressing concern on the fact that the funding is guiding the policies and the work of the WG's; and not the other way around. Also finding the best, the most qualified experts writing the reports of the WG's could occasionally be a problem, because of this situation. We acknowledge in this context the Project Support Instrument PSI Trust Fund, managed by NEFCO, which is hopefully operational soon, as a step in the right direction. But eventually we need to consider a more coordinated approach, incl. a joint budget for the AC.

Furthermore, coordination and cooperation between the WG's should be strengthened with a view of avoiding any overlapping thematic projects and discussions. The Information Forum tomorrow is a great opportunity to discuss ways and means of reaching a better interaction between the WG's themselves as well as the WG's and the SAO.

Let me mention just two of the success stories of our WG's: the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment by PAME and the Arctic Biodiversity Trends 2010 report to be released later today. On the side of Task Forces, the Search and Rescue TF is already a milestone with regard to our emerging normative activities. How to get the global attention to these Reports they so abundantly deserve, and how to get the action emanating from the findings of the Reports; that is our common concern. The Communication and Outreach Strategy of the AC, now under consideration, and the Information Strategies and Programmes of the WG's are indispensable tools in achieving this aim.

The consistent follow-up of the WG reports could be enhanced. As an example, the 2004 Arctic Human Development Report – as important as it is – is surely not reflecting the latest knowledge and information on the situation in the region, and was badly in need to be updated. Now thanks to the Nordic Council of Ministers and other supporters, a follow-up, “The Arctic Social Indicators” has just been released. But that just proves my point of the need of a more prudent follow-up mechanism.

To use our limited resources effectively - and to respond to the requests of being more proactive - we first: need to identify carefully – and without delay – what are the emerging challenges we are facing in the Arctic, and then: decide what should be done about them.

Undoubtedly, the Arctic Governments and Indigenous peoples know best what is going on in our region. A lot what is going on in the Arctic has a global reach; and vice-versa, the international community has a lot to contribute to the Arctic. The future of the Arctic cannot be the concern of some states only, but a legitimate concern for all. The Arctic Council will be stronger by engaging and interacting , in a transparent manner with those with legitimate interest in our region.