

ARCTIC COUNCIL
MEETING OF SENIOR ARCTIC OFFICIALS

Svartsengi, Iceland

23-24 October, 2004

DRAFT MINUTES

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

The Chairman of Senior Arctic Officials, Ambassador Gunnar Pálsson, opened the meeting and welcomed participants. The Chairman welcomed in particular the new SAO of the Russian Federation, Ambassador Vitaly Churkin.

2. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The meeting approved the draft agenda circulated on 23 September 2003.

3. APPROVAL OF AD HOC OBSERVERS

The meeting approved the Arctic Circumpolar Route as ad hoc observer at the meeting.

4. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM THE LAST SAO MEETING

The meeting approved the minutes of the SAO meeting in Reykjavík, Iceland, on 9-10 April 2003.

5. UPDATE ON THE ARCTIC COUNCIL WORKING GROUP ACTIVITIES

Reports from all the Working Groups had been distributed before the meeting. The Chairman asked the Chairs of the Working Groups to present their reports to the SAOs.

5.1. ACAP

The former Chairman of ACAP, Mr. Per Dövle, presented the ACAP progress report to the meeting. In his presentation, Mr. Dövle indicated some uncertainty about in-kind contributions from Russia to the PCB project whereas the working group was hoping for full involvement of the Russian authorities. As regards the mercury project, a better coordination among member states is needed. Some problems have been detected regarding the obsolete pesticides project, not least as regards the transport of obsolete pesticides through certain territories in Russia. The Norilsk cleaner production project is completed. Similar projects will be considered within ACAP. As regards the financing of ACAP projects, most activities are financed through 2003 and the beginning of 2004. However, financing is needed for the second half of 2004, when several projects enter into phase two. New activities include brominated flame retardants and the group also aims at establishing guidelines for developing and implementing demonstration projects and asked SAOs for their support.

Finally, Mr. Dövle introduced the new Chairman of ACAP, Mr. Bob Dyer.

The Chair opened the floor for discussion and asked that two of the requests put forth in the ACAP report to SAOs concerning the financing of Permanent Participants participation and the use of financial mechanisms be taken up in relation to agenda items 7 and 8.

The meeting thanked ACAP for its good work and Mr. Dövle received special thanks for his excellent work as the Chairman of the group. The meeting welcomed the new Chairman of ACAP, Mr. Dyer.

The new initiative on brominated flame retardants was well received and the creation of guidelines for developing and implementing demonstration projects received support. The Norilsk project was referred to by many as a showcase project. The ACAP mercury reduction project was regarded as especially important and the point was made that it could be harmonized with other international mercury reduction programmes. ACAP was encouraged to work closely together with UNECE and UNEP to this end.

Russia underlined the extensive work done domestically regarding the implementation of international commitments relating to the environment. The Russian representative stated that the ACAP projects will be actively supported by Russia, through in-kind contributions, among others.

The representative of the Gwich'in Council International stated that further efforts should be made to communicate the work of ACAP, and other working groups, to the local communities in the Arctic region.

The Netherlands informed the meeting of its participation in the PCB project and supported the Chair's call for a more active involvement of Russia in some of the ACAP projects.

5.2. AMAP

The Chair gave the floor to the Chairman of AMAP, Mr. Helgi Jensson, who introduced the AMAP progress report and highlighted in particular that AMAP has circulated a draft strategic plan for 2004-2010. Among other things, the draft plan addresses fast track assessments, continued monitoring and contribution of scientific information to other relevant international fora. The plan should be finalized at the next AMAP working group meeting and delivered to the next SAO-meeting. The Chairman informed the meeting that AMAP and CAFF aim at finalizing the plan on coordinating monitoring activities before the next SAO-meeting. The Chairman drew attention to a recently published report by AMAP, in cooperation with NEFCO, on the hot spots in the Barents Sea and informed the meeting that the assessment of acidification is going according to plan.

The meeting thanked AMAP for its good work and several delegations welcomed in particular the pragmatic way in which AMAP monitoring results are presented through smaller reports to Ministers at each of their meetings.

Russia suggested that assessments of the status of major Russian rivers be included in the strategic plan, not least because of their impact on the situation in the Arctic as regards climate change. Russia presented a written proposal on this issue, circulated at the meeting. Russia expressed its satisfaction with the fact that AMAP findings are available in the national languages.

Norway drew attention to the fact the many AMAP projects have been financed through the Nordic Council of Ministers and thanked those involved for that financing.

The WWF expressed the opinion that mercury and new or current use persistent organic pollutants, including brominated flame retardants, should be part of the AMAP strategic plan. The WWF also supported the Russian proposal that the effects on climate change of the flows of the major Russian rivers should be addressed in the strategic plan.

The Chair drew attention to the one request presented in the AMAP report concerning the availability of necessary finances to allow AMAP to fulfill its work plan and encouraged SAOs to take a look at it.

Finally, following informal consultations, the issue of oil and gas assessment was addressed. Mr. Jensson introduced an outline on the assessment of Petroleum Hydrocarbons in the Arctic, circulated among the SAOs and Permanent Participants on 1 October 2003.

The meeting found the outline in the main acceptable but some reservations were made. It was felt that the project should not focus exclusively on the AMAP contamination point of view. The outline should be broadened to take account of not only risks but also benefits. The outline was referred back to AMAP with a request that the necessary revisions be made.

The question of providing other working groups with mandates to draft specific chapters of the assessment was raised and met with approval. It was mentioned that other stakeholders, such as oil and gas authorities in the member states and academic institutions, might also be involved.

As regards the social and economic aspects of this undertaking, the Chair invited the Chairman of the SDWG, Mr. Ólafsson, to address the meeting. Mr. Ólafsson made the point that the SDWG was a logical forum for taking over the responsibility for dealing with the social and economic consequences of future oil and gas developments in the Arctic. Mr. Ólafsson also made the point that no arrangement for the funding of this assignment had been made within the SDWG.

5.3. CAFF

The Chair gave the floor to the Chairman of CAFF, Mr. Kent Wohl, who presented the CAFF progress report. Mr. Wohl drew attention to a new CAFF report and the circumpolar seabird report No 9. The two main CAFF keystone projects are progressing well, i.e. the ECORA project, which should be presented at a workshop in the spring 2004 and the CAFF Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Project under

which eight monitoring networks are being initiated. The Chairman informed the meeting of CAFF's intention to take part in the oil and gas assessment.

The Chair thanked CAFF for its good work.

5.4. EPPR

The Chair gave the floor to Ms. Johnston, the Chairman of EPPR. As regards ongoing activities, Ms. Johnston informed the meeting that the shoreline cleanup assessment technology manual is in a near-final draft. The circumpolar map of resources at risk is completed but the whole question of data management is being addressed by a number of Arctic Council working groups. As regards natural disasters, Ms. Johnston asked for recommendations by the next SAO meeting as to the group's future in that area. The outline on the oil and gas assessment will be examined by EPPR on the basis of its mandate.

The Chair thanked Ms. Johnston for her report and reiterated the requests in the EPPR progress report concerning ongoing projects of the EPPR, the dialogue between EPPR and both AMAP and PAME regarding the distribution of work, as well as the forthcoming discussion towards placing greater emphasis on radiological and other hazardous materials, and the possible expansion of EPPR's mandate to include natural disasters.

The meeting thanked EPPR for its good work.

Russia introduced the Arctic Rescue initiative, a mechanism for the coordination of international activities on prevention and response as regards the consequences of emergencies in the Arctic, proposed by the EMERCOM of Russia

The Saami Council representative made a statement regarding the negative impact of oil and gas production in the Arctic on indigenous peoples in the region.

The Arctic Athabaskan Council expressed an interest in the work of EPPR on a radiation information package and informed the meeting that the Assembly of First Nations in Canada was working on similar issues.

5.5. PAME

Before giving the floor to the Chairman of PAME, Mr. Davíð Egilsson, the Chair informed the meeting that Russia had nominated Mr. Yuriy Alexandrovskiy, Deputy Director of the Department of International Cooperation in the Field of Environment Protection of the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources, as Vice Chair of PAME and thanked Russia for the nomination.

Mr. Egilsson introduced the main PAME developments since the last SAO meeting, apart from activities related to the marine strategic plan, to be discussed under agenda item 10. The Arctic Water Oil Transfer Guidelines are progressing according to schedule and the 2002 Offshore Oil and Gas Guidelines have been translated into Russian. The Chairman informed the meeting of the GEF/Russian NPA-Arctic Project, including private and public sector round tables and a partnership conference organized by Russia.

Russia informed the meeting of progress made in Russia regarding the NPA Arctic and stated that the project is strongly supported by the Russian government.

5.6. SDWG

The Chair gave the floor to the Chairman of SDWG, Mr. Hugi Ólafsson. Mr. Ólafsson informed the meeting of the main issues discussed at the meeting of the SDWG, held the day before. The SDWG has eleven active projects of a wide range, including the newest project on women's participation in decision making in fisheries management and the Arctic Human Development Report, a major deliverable for the next Ministerial meeting. Regarding the sustainable development action plan, a concept paper has been produced by Russia, which provides a basis for continued work. The group aims at completing the so-called phase one by the Ministerial in 2004. The SDWG and the lead country will seek the involvement of other working groups as regards the development of the plan. The Chairman informed the meeting of Canada's intention to produce a publication with the proposed title: Capacity building overview of the Arctic Council, to be made available at the Ministerial in 2004. As regards future activities, the group discussed the follow-up to the ICT conference in Akureyri, the day of higher education, and the need for clear guidance from the SAOs as the group's involvement in the assessment of hydrocarbons in the Arctic, already addressed under agenda item 5.2.

The meeting thanked the SDWG for its good work.

The United States posed a question to Canada regarding the content of the planned publication on capacity-building of the Arctic Council.

In response to the question, the Canadian SAO called on Mr. Ron Lyen who stated that the aim was to provide, in close cooperation with the Arctic Council working groups, a broad overview of programmes and policies of the various working groups in the context of capacity building and best practices.

Finland expressed satisfaction with the fruitful cooperation between the SDWG and the Northern Forum.

Russia expressed a wish for a constructive cooperation with other working groups in developing the sustainable development action plan.

The representative of the Standing Committee of the Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region reiterated the committee's keen interest in the AHDR and informed the meeting that one of three main themes at the SCPAR 2004 conference in Nuuk would be human development in the Arctic.

Norway asked the SDWG to consider listing the member states participating actively in the projects on its project list. Furthermore, Norway suggested linking the AHDR and the sustainable development action plan as appropriate.

The Saami Council stressed that special attention be paid to small languages in the follow-up to the ICT conference.

6. ACIA activities

6.1. ACIA Scientific Report

The ACIA Chairman, Dr. Robert Corell, gave an overview of the state of play as regards the ACIA scientific work. Substantial changes have been detected in the Arctic, including warming of Arctic oceanic waters, thawing of previously frozen grounds and increased levels of ultraviolet radiation. In addition, the assessment reveals that the Arctic is warming two to three times more rapidly than other areas of the world and predicts that there is likely to be substantial changes in the nature of the ice cover of the Arctic. The ACIA focuses on evaluating how climate variability, occurring over decades, impacts humans and nature in the Arctic and how to communicate that information to a broad audience. The assessment is connected to other relevant assessments that are ongoing in the North, including the AHDR. The so-called indigenous perspective has been made an organic part of the scientific assessment.

The Chairman informed the meeting that the scientific report had been completed and sent out for peer review. The content of the scientific document will be “frozen” on 16 January 2004. The content of the overview report, produced on the basis of the science report as a more readable summary, will be “frozen” around the end of February 2004.

As regards communications, the main goal is to get the scientific information out in a readable and accessible form. An ACIA communication strategy has been developed and a symposium will be held to introduce the findings of ACIA. Dr. Corell asked participants to estimate the amount of copies of the scientific reports required, and stated that a letter to this end would be sent out shortly.

6.2. ACIA Policy Document

The Chairman of AMAP, Mr. Jensson, introduced the draft ACIA policy process on behalf of AMAP and CAFF. Two meetings of the policy drafting team have been held since the last SAO meeting, in May and October. The aim is to produce a stand-alone document of about 20 pages. Four sets of recommendations have been developed, i.e. on mitigation, adaptation, research, observation monitoring and modeling and communication and education. In addition, the document should include a scientific summary. The policy drafting team plans to present the draft policy document to SAOs in April 2004.

The SAO-Chair informed the meeting of ongoing consultations among SAOs and Permanent Participants on the timetable of the policy documents and proposed to put forth a Chair’s proposal as to how to take work forward as regards the timelines of the policy document. The Chair’s proposal was met with approval.

7. FINANCING OF PERMANENT PARTICIPANTS’ PARTICIPATION

The Chairman of the Indigenous Peoples Secretariat’s Board, Mr. Stephen Mills, introduced a discussion paper entitled; Funding Indigenous Peoples’ Activities at the Arctic Council, prepared by the IPS and circulated by the Chair of the SAOs before the meeting. The intention of the paper is to give an accurate picture of funding available to the Permanent Participants and the IPS. Mr. Mills pointed out that there was a huge difference between the funding sources of the different Permanent

Participants. He underlined that Permanent Participants volunteer their time to participate in the work of the Arctic Council. Furthermore, he declared that Permanent Participants would prefer working out a permanent solution to the issue of funding their participation.

Before opening the floor for comments, the Chair reiterated two suggestions tabled in his letter to SAOs and Permanent Participants of 25 September 2003. On the one hand, it was suggested that SAOs look into the possibility of responding to requested levels of support for 2004, put forward by the Permanent Participants in Appendix 1 of the financing paper and on the other hand respond to several suggestions as to possible ways of improving current funding arrangements for PP participation, put forth in the letter.

Canada put forth a proposal to the member states, offering to contribute 300.000 Canadian dollars annually to a core fund to support the participation of Permanent Participants in Arctic Council activities, provided that other member states did the same.

While the Canadian proposal was considered helpful by many, it was considered necessary to study it further, not least to examine for what purposes a core fund would be used, should it be set up. It is necessary to answer this question in order to be able to present the Canadian proposal to financial authorities in capitals.

The United States commented that it could go along with a model that included funding for participation of Permanent Participants in the budget of projects and other Arctic Council initiatives. The US representative said that this approach had been used successfully in the ACIA process and that the US would like to work along those lines as the Arctic Council moves forward on, for example, the oil and gas assessment or the PAME strategic plan. Sweden stated that this approach could be carried out in practice by making sure that projects are not launched unless funding of Permanent Participants' participation in them has been assured.

Sweden declared a preference for a system of assessed contributions to support the participation of Permanent Participants.

The Northern Forum thanked the Permanent Participants for their efforts to clarify financial issues and mentioned that the Northern Forum had provided substantial funds for the participation of Permanent Participants to attend meetings and other events in the Arctic Council and declared its willingness to continue to do so.

The representative of the Saami Council asked that the meeting agree on future principles for dealing with the issue of funding Permanent Participants' participation and that these be put on paper.

The representative of the Gwich'in Council International reflected on the suggestion made to include funding in the project budgets and explained that this approach would not answer the need for core capacity, expressed by the Permanent Participants. For example, it would not cover preparations for meetings of the Arctic Council. He also pointed out that many Arctic Council projects are funded in ways that do not necessarily resolve the issue of funding the participation of Permanent Participants,

i.e. when, for example, a report is sponsored in such a way that member states provide chapter authors.

The RAIPON representative underlined that the issue of funding the participation of Permanent Participants does not only include travel expenses but also refers to the principles that make the Arctic Council unique. He called on the Russian Federation to contribute more actively to this process.

In summing up the discussion, the Chair reiterated that the intent of requesting a discussion paper on funding indigenous peoples' activities in the Arctic Council had been to make the whole process more transparent and making it possible for the member states to come to the meeting with constructive ideas as to how to accommodate the request from the Permanent Participants. Two concrete suggestions had come forward during the meeting. Firstly, the Canadian proposal to set up a core fund for indigenous peoples' activities. Secondly, that in future, all Arctic Council projects should dedicate a part of their budget to indigenous peoples involvement.

The Chair proposed to prepare a draft paper, in co-operation with the IPS, building on the ideas put forth at the meeting. In addition, he expressed his wish to call upon the countries that spoke in favor of those ideas and the working groups, as the case may be, to take this issue forward. The summary was accepted by consensus.

8. FINANCING OF ARCTIC COUNCIL PROJECTS

The Chair referred to a discussion paper circulated before the meeting with the aim of providing background to ongoing deliberations regarding the financing of Arctic Council projects and reiterated that the paper does not include a concrete proposal as to the way ahead. The Chair thanked Mr. Pitkanen, Managing Director of NEFCO, for the time and effort he had put into the background paper.

The United States expressed concern about the so-called assembly of contributors, identified in the background paper as a body related to the possible setting up of a trust fund. Such a body could, in the US view, potentially change the way the Arctic Council was organized as a consensus forum, since not all the member states were likely to become contributors.

Sweden said that ACAP had identified a gap in the way the Arctic Council works, as regards financing and project formulation. The missing element is the capacity to move from an idea to a bankable project. The trust fund was seen, by Sweden, as means of providing the technical financial know-how and other additional competences needed.

Norway underlined the need for the Arctic Council to demonstrate that it can manage, finalize and deliver projects. The Arctic Council can manage smaller projects on its own, but for making larger impact, financial assistance of outside institutions was needed. Norway saw the setting up of a joint technical trust fund as a sensible first step to be taken in this direction. It could allow ACAP to take further certain projects developed by it. Norway envisaged that in future, the trust fund could be extended by different accounts for other kinds of financial need inside the Council. Norway would be willing to contribute to a joint technical trust fund and could also agree to a

procedure of earmarking the contributions of each member state. The decision-making procedure of the trust fund should be considered further.

Canada recognizes the need to stimulate outside investments to complement the projects and the activities of the Arctic Council. Canada also expressed some concern about certain details that relate to how the Council might evolve in the preparation of projects with large budgets. This needs to be discussed further and the paper does not answer this, nor does it explain fully some of its conclusions. Canada underlined the importance of solving the full spectrum of Arctic Council financing needs, including the question of adequate finances for the participation of Permanent Participants. Canada is willing to work with others on exploring this issue.

Denmark found the trust fund to be a good first step and stated that a concrete proposal for a new system to increase the capital flow to Arctic Council project preparatory work should be established. Participation in the fund should be voluntary and Denmark might not participate to begin with.

Finland encouraged the Arctic Council to increase efforts to obtain EU funding in Arctic Council projects. Finland proposed to call together a special session where current methods of funding Arctic Council activities as well as possible future solutions would be discussed.

The representative of the Netherlands stated that the Netherlands had been contributing to ACAP projects and that the administrative and financial capacity available to those projects could be strengthened and that the Netherlands would like to be associated with any initiative on the part of the AC to strengthen that capacity.

SCPAR expressed interest in the trust fund idea and saw it as a promising answer to the lack of implementation within the Arctic Council.

The Chair invited Mr. Pitkanen to take the floor and address some of the questions raised.

Mr. Pitkanen said that a joint technical trust fund would in no way change the modalities of the Arctic Council - the voluntary nature of it being a key issue. A trust fund does not imply the establishment of new organizational structure or institution, except for involving a competent fund manager, which could provide the necessary technical expertise to guide the project development. Linking it to Arctic Council work could provide an enhancement of capacity to develop and implement projects. As regards the question raised by the United States, one should distinguish between the priority setting, i.e. in which area to work, and the concrete decisions on allocating funds for specific steps in the implementation of a project. As regards the latter, it was a well-established practice that the contributors had a say in the actual allocation of funds for a given purpose. The priority setting, however, could be a matter for the SAOs, with input from working groups and experts. In such a way, SAOs would provide the basic instructions to the trust fund and the consensus structure of the Arctic Council would be maintained.

Mr. Pitkanen welcomed the will expressed at the meeting to go deeper and explore what a concrete proposal would look like. Since there was a will we must look into

how such a fund mechanism might be set up and what the implications would be. NEFCO was willing to work together with the SAOs in developing the idea further.

The question was raised why NEFCO was willing to pledge its future support. In response, Mr. Pitkanen stated that promoting environmental projects was a part of NEFCO's mandate and that promising efforts were taking place in the Arctic Council.

The Chair concluded and pointed out that some of the questions raised during the discussion were only for SAOs themselves to answer, including questions relating to the consistency of the trust fund with the internal structures of the Arctic Council.

The Chair underlined that the meeting needed to establish whether the idea of the trust fund was viable or not, and if it would be acceptable to continue exploring it. Judging from comments made, the Chair concluded that the idea of a trust fund was alive and well but substantial problems remained to be worked out.

The Chair proposed that he compile a list of the additional questions raised at the meeting and invite member states to provide comments in written form to the discussion paper. Then the Chair would seek, in co-operation with the Director of NEFCO, to address those questions.

The Chair recognized the idea of setting up a conference and stated that this was a useful suggestion, provided that we get to the next stage of actually proposing to set up a trust fund. The Chair suggested that the proposed conference be kept on hold until the time was right.

9. CONFERENCE ON INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN THE ARCTIC; REPORT

The conference on information and communication technology in the Arctic constituted one of the elements of the programme for the Icelandic Chair and focused on three areas; ICT infrastructure, distance education and telemedicine. The Chairman of the task force, responsible for the preparation of the conference, Mr. Thorsteinn Gunnarsson, presented the conference report, circulated at the meeting. The report was based on presentations and discussions at the conference and a background document prepared before the conference by the University of the Arctic. A wealth of information was exchanged at the conference and several suggestions as to possible actions were put forth. The conference report contains references to suggested goals and actions as regards ICT in the Arctic.

The meeting thanked Mr. Gunnarsson and the Chairmanship for organizing the conference and for placing the issue of information and communication technology on the Arctic Council agenda.

The Chair concluded that further analyses of the lessons learned at the conference should be carried out in order to put forward recommendations to SAOs and eventually Ministers as regards ICT. The Chair expressed his intention to present SAOs with a paper, including recommendations, which they could respond to before their next meeting in spring 2004.

The Chair expressed special thanks to the Northern Forum, which had provided a full time staff member to the conference task force, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, for their cooperation.

10. WORKSHOP ON THE ARCTIC MARINE STRATEGIC PLAN; REPORT

The Chairman of PAME, Mr. Egilson, presented a summary of the Workshop in support of the Arctic Marine Strategic Plan (AMSP), held on 20-22 October 2003 in Reykjavík. The main purpose of the AMSP is to develop a more coordinated and integrated strategic approach to the protection of the Arctic marine environment. The AMSP will be based on the eco-system approach, the regional seas approach and the partnership approach. The workshop identified climate change and increased economic activity as the main drivers of change as regards the oceans. The strategy should provide opportunities to respond to those issues and promote international linkages.

Mr. Egilson also outlined the timeframe for the AMSP, to be finalized by the Ministerial meeting in 2004 and presented on that occasion.

The meeting welcomed the AMSP and the workshop and stressed the importance of interaction among the Arctic Council working groups on work to be carried out in this context.

Finally, Ms. Sanderson, a member of the Danish delegation, introduced the outcome of the second North Atlantic Conference, held in Shetland on 1-2 October 2003, including the conference declaration entitled; Living of the Sea in the North Atlantic.

11. THE EU'S NEW NORTHERN DIMENSION ACTION PLAN; ARCTIC COUNCIL FOLLOW-UP

The representative of the European Commission, Mr. Giuseppe Busini, introduced the Union's recently adopted Second Northern Dimension Action Plan. Among other things, Mr. Busini stated that the new plan constitutes a policy framework and is to be implemented through existing programmes of the Commission and other bodies.

Before opening the floor for discussion, the Chair drew attention to two proposals he had presented prior to the meeting. One regards identifying Arctic Council projects to cooperate on with the European Commission on the basis of the new Action Plan, the other the organization of a one-day workshop with the Commission to focus on concrete projects of cooperation between the Council and the Commission.

The meeting thanked Mr. Busini for attending the meeting and for his presentation of the new Action Plan, which was welcomed, in particular its emphasis on Arctic concerns. The two proposals put forth by the Chair were accepted and many ideas were introduced as regards cooperation possibilities between the Arctic Council and the European Commission. The Chair stated that he would address the working groups and ask for their input to a "shopping list" of projects to be presented to the Commission. Plans for organizing the workshop would continue.

12. ARCTIC COUNCIL FOLLOW-UP OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

At the outset, the Chair observed that the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development had decided to establish a new work programme based on a two-year cycle. The 12th session of the CSD, to be held on 16-30 April 2004 and the 13th session in 2005, will focus on the topics of water, sanitation and human settlements. In the opinion of the Chair, the Arctic Council should have adequate opportunities to contribute to the implementation of the Johannesburg plan and noted the growing attention being given to Arctic issues within the UN, including at the 48th session of the UN open-ended informal consultations on ocean and law of the sea issues.

Several participants encouraged the Chair to continue presenting the work of the Arctic Council in the UN system.

Norway informed the meeting that the Norwegian Minister for the Environment, Mr. Børge Brende, had been elected chairman of the 12th session of the CSD and recalled that regional organizations had been invited to provide contributions to CSD preparations, either directly or to the UNECE session in January 2004. A letter from Mr. Brende regarding objectives and priorities was circulated at the meeting.

The representative of GRID Arendal stated that GRID Arendal was considering a side event in relation to the CSD meeting in April 2004, where vital Arctic graphics would be displayed. The Chair requested that he be kept informed as the idea develops.

The Northern Forum asked that the Arctic Council and the Northern Forum continue to work together on future sustainable development projects.

Finland made the point that those involved in the Arctic Council could make people involved in the work of the CSD more aware of Arctic related issues in each of the member states.

13. THE NORTHERN VIEW; OBSERVATION FOR NORTHERN MONITORING

The Northern View earth observation for northern monitoring was placed on the agenda at the request of Canada and introduced by Mr. David Arthurs. The Global Monitoring of Environment and Security (GMES) is a joint initiative of the European Space Agency and the European Commission. The main objectives are operational monitoring and safety monitoring (meaning security of life and property). The Northern view is one of several projects falling under this hat, with the main objective of supporting public policy as regards the environment and sustainable development and the scientific groups in the North by providing them with additional information. Services include sea ice cover monitoring, iceberg monitoring, oil discharge monitoring, land cover habitat and infrastructure monitoring. The Northern View is interested in learning more about the needs of potential users and in acting as an interface between users and providers. An invitation from the Northern View to the Arctic Council was circulated before the meeting concerning increased co-operation. To access those resources requires the involvement and support of the Northern community, preferably at the highest level of the Arctic Council.

The Chair thanked Mr. Arthurs for his useful information and noted that earth observations are especially important in the North, not least, as monitoring and observations will remain key tasks of the Arctic Council. Interest was expressed in exploring the issues further. At the same time, it was pointed out that several actors could provide comparable services in this field.

Sweden circulated a paper on the Circum-Arctic Environmental Observatories Network, the so-called CEON project which focuses on linking existing terrestrial stations in the circumpolar Arctic and mentioned the possibility of linking that with the Northern View. Furthermore, it was suggested that the meeting consider having a presentation on the CEON at the spring meeting of the SAOs. In addition, Sweden proposed exploring the possibility of working out a co-operation agreement between the Arctic Council and the European Space Agency (ESA).

Responding to the suggestion made by Sweden, the Chair stated his willingness to consider developing cooperation with the ESA on the basis of consensus, but pointed out that the Arctic Council did not have the legal competence to strike agreements.

14. INTERNATIONAL POLAR YEAR; ARCTIC COUNCIL PRIORITIES

By way of introduction, the Chairman referred to his letter of 6 October 2003, concerning Arctic Council priorities for the International Polar Year (IPY) and asked the meeting to consider how the Arctic Council could become involved in the process of developing the concept of the IPY, what aspects of the Council's work should be drawn on in that respect and what should be expected from the exercise.

The meeting expressed great interest in the IPY, which it saw as an opportunity to stimulate cooperation and coordination among international research communities, to increase awareness and visibility of the Arctic region and promote research in the Arctic. It was felt that the Arctic Council should be actively involved in pursuing and preparing the IPY. More active cooperation with relevant Arctic Council observers, such as IASC, was also mentioned in this context.

In particular, the Senior Arctic Officials called for the inclusion of a human dimension in the concept of the IPY.

Russia underlined the importance of the two previous polar years and informed the meeting that the Russian initiative to hold a third polar year had been supported at the WMO 14th Congress in May 2003.

The ACIA Chairman, informed the meeting that all ACIA chapter authors had identified research priorities of importance that need to be addressed in the context of climate change in order to answer some of the questions of the future. Informal consultations with the IPY organizers would continue to see if the IPY can integrate some of the needs that are identified in the climate assessment into the long-term programme.

Finally, the Chair stated that the Arctic Science Summit Week, to be hosted in Iceland in April 2004, would be an excellent opportunity to focus on the IPY. In addition, the Chair asked Russia, as the initiator of the IPY and the next Arctic Council Chair, to carefully consider the involvement of the Arctic Council in the IPY.

15. FOLLOW-UP ON THE PROGRESS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE ARCTIC

The Rector of the University of the Arctic, Mr. Lars Kullerud, presented the work of the University of the Arctic.

16. PRESENTATION FROM THE ALEUT INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION

The Aleut International Association had requested an opportunity to present its work. Ms. Arlene Gundersen, Board member of the Aleut International Association (AIA), representing Aleut peoples of the Aleutian Islands in the United States and Russia's Aleuts on the Commander Islands and Kamchatka, presented the activities of the AIA and the lifestyle of the Aleut people.

The Chair made the point that if other Permanent Participants would like to provide similar presentations in subsequent meetings of the SAOs the Secretariat would need to be informed in a timely manner.

17. PRESENTATION FROM THE NORTHERN RESEARCH FORUM

The Chairman of the Northern Research Forum, Mr. Lassi Heininen, presented the work of the Forum to the meeting.

18. CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL 2004-2006

The Chair reiterated that Russia had informally notified the member states of its interest in assuming the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council for the period 2004-2006 and invited the SAO of Russia to take the floor.

The Russian SAO confirmed Russia's interest in assuming the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council for the period 2004-2006.

Member states and Permanent Participants welcomed the Russian offer to take over the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council 2004-2006. The Chair recommended that it be suggested to Ministers that the Russian Federation be the host country of the Arctic Council chairmanship 2004-2006 and that this be reflected in the Ministerial declaration for 2004.

19. DECISIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

No decisions awaited the meeting at this stage.

20. OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair acknowledged a brochure prepared by the United States and coordinated with the member states and Permanent Participants. The US SAO offered to edit the brochure, taking into account comments made and send it back to member states and Permanent Participants for their use.

The Chair informed the meeting that the dates proposed earlier for the Ministerial Meeting in 2004 had been found unsuitable for the host country and proposed to circulate other options following the meeting.

Finally, the Chair expressed his gratitude and best wishes to Ambassador Mary Simon, the SAO of Canada, who attended her last SAO meeting. Ambassador Simon then addressed the meeting.

21. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for 4 and 5 May 2004.