



REPUBLIC OF KOREA'S COMMITMENT ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARCTIC

The Republic of Korea would like to congratulate the 25th anniversary of the Arctic Council and the Icelandic government for the successful conclusion of the Arctic Council chairmanship. Korea particularly notes the unprecedented challenges presented by the global pandemic, which has been well addressed by the Arctic Council and highly appreciates the leadership shown by the Icelandic chairmanship during this period. Iceland has in particular worked to enhance the constructive engagement with Arctic Council Observers.

Korea strives to join the global response to the challenges in the Arctic as a responsible partner. No single country can respond to climate change alone. The environmental changes in the Arctic ironically present opportunities in the region. Korea is keen to engage with the Arctic community to explore means of cooperation in a sustainable manner. Korea is committed to work with the Arctic community based on goals of co-prosperity and collaboration in addressing these complex and interlinked challenges and opportunities in the region. Korea also aims to align its Arctic policy with the Paris Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Hence, Korea is focused on scientific research to address climate change and environmental protection in the Arctic as well as strengthening the capacity to support the Arctic indigenous communities.

Korea joined the Arctic Council as an Observer in 2013 and has since sought to provide constructive input and build strong relations with the Council's Working Groups and Permanent Participants. During the Icelandic Chairmanship of 2019-2021, the Korea Maritime Institute (KMI) participated in the PAME Working Group project as one of the co-leads on 'Strengthening Observer engagement with PAME's shipping-related activities.' The National Institute of Ecology (NIE) of Korea engaged in the CAFF Working Group's Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative in addressing the sustainability issues of the Arctic breeding migratory bird populations, as Korea is part of the migration route for birds along the East Asian flyway. Experts from the Korea Polar Research Institute (KOPRI) contributed to the meteorological and climate aspects of the Arctic Council works by actively participating in the AMAP Climate Expert Group meetings and workshops. The 'Arctic-East Asia Weather Linkage Workshop' that KOPRI co-hosted in Korea in May 2019 is one of such examples.

Aside from participation in working group projects, Korea also contributed to the Arctic Council by providing input upon request and took part in the SAO-based Marine Mechanism webinar which was launched for the first time by Iceland. As a country with strong linkages to the ocean, Korea is keen on promoting the sustainability of the world's oceans and looks forward to continued engagement in the Arctic Council's work related to ocean sustainability.

During the upcoming Russian Chairmanship in 2021-2023, Korea is committed to take part in Working Group projects that are continued from the Icelandic chairmanship. Korea will strengthen effort in providing other Working Group projects with experts and science-based information. Furthermore, Korea will be engaged in the SDWG project on "Arctic Hydrogen Energy Applications and Demonstrations (AHEAD)." In the EPPR Working Group, Korean experts will be joining the 'New low-sulfur Fuels - Fate and Behavior in Cold Water Conditions' project.



Korea believes that the rapid changes in the Arctic and the challenges they bring, can be better addressed when both Arctic and non-Arctic countries come together and use their best joint efforts. The projects coordinated within the Arctic Council Working Groups have provided important opportunities for Observer states in cooperating with the Members and Permanent Participants. There is, however, room for further improvement in the Working Group project development process, which would allow all participating parties to coordinate their efforts effectively. The current system bars Observers from contributing to a project in the conception stage and allows the access of information on the project only after it is officially launched. Allowing Observers to take part in the initial phases of project-design will enable them to align their efforts early on, and bring more participation of Observers in the Working Group projects. To facilitate such change, posting open calls for new WG projects on the Arctic Council website could be considered.

The Arctic demonstrates a considerably different environment compared to 25 years ago, yet the Arctic Council in its 25th year has shown great resilience and flexibility, contributing to the promotion of cooperation in the Arctic. In particular, the Arctic Council has been playing an important role in maintaining the Arctic as a zone of peace. To respond to the Arctic Paradox where both challenges and opportunities co-exist, a multilateral approach backed by the concerted efforts of the international community is critical.

Going forward, cooperation between the Arctic and the non-Arctic states is crucial to protect the environment of the Arctic, address climate change and promote sustainable development around the world. The imperative may require new legal regimes in addition to the current international agreements, including the UN convention on the Law of the Sea to better govern and protect the Arctic. Korea believes the discussion and its formation process should include not only Arctic states but also non-Arctic states.

We hope that the Arctic Council will gradually evolve into a more open and inclusive organization so that observer states can make greater contributions to the Council's activities. An Icelandic proverb says, "On thin ice everybody has the same strength." To cope with the enormous challenges of the Arctic, non-Arctic countries should be invited to play a greater role working together with the Arctic countries. In March this year, the Korean government passed the Polar Activities Promotion Act, providing the much-needed legal framework for Korea's commitment to the Polar region. This Act will enable Korea to further engage in activities in promoting sustainability in the circumpolar Arctic and strengthen its engagement with the Arctic Council Member-States, Permanent Participants as well as other Observers. As one of the most active Observer states with keen interest in resolving the Arctic Paradox, Korea will continue to engage in global efforts to ensure the sustainable future of the Arctic. /END/