

PRESS RELEASE

April 28, 2000; 4:00pm ~ Fairbanks, AK, USA

Arctic Council Meetings Held in Fairbanks, Alaska April 26-28, 2000

The Arctic Council's Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) and Permanent Participants (PPs) representing Arctic indigenous organizations, as well as observers to the Council met in Fairbanks, Alaska, April 26-28 under the chairmanship of the United States. More than 150 delegates actively discussed and debated cooperative measures to promote environmental protection and sustainable development in the Arctic region. Chief David Salmon, 2nd Traditional Chief of Interior Alaska Athabascans from the Gwich'in village of Chalkyitsik, opened the SAO Meeting with a speech urging delegates to work together with indigenous people of the Arctic to address threats to the Arctic environment. Mark Hamilton, President of the University of Alaska welcomed delegates to the meeting on behalf of the University.

As part of the Council's on-going efforts to reduce overlap and duplication of work with other fora active in the Arctic, the SAOs received updates on activities and initiatives being undertaken by the European Union, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers, and the Northern Forum.

The Arctic Council is a high-level intergovernmental forum established in 1996. The eight Member States of the Arctic Council are Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States. Permanent Participant status is currently held by the Aleut International Association, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, and the Saami Council. The Gwich'in Tribal Council has applied to become the 5th Permanent Participant of the Council. Finland has offered to take over the duties of chairing the Council at the conclusion of the U.S. chairmanship in the fall of 2000.

Environmental Protection

Chairs from each of the Council's working groups reported on progress their groups have made towards fulfilling tasks assigned to them at the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting held at Iqaluit, Canada, on September 18-19, 1998. Four of the groups, the "Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program" (AMAP), "Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna" (CAFF), "Emergency Prevention, Preparedness, and Response" (EPPR), and "Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment" (PAME), address environmental issues such as contaminants, conservation of living resources, marine pollution prevention, and environmental threats.

Delegations reviewed options for organizing and implementing an Arctic Council Action Plan to eliminate pollution of the Arctic (ACAP), a key initiative that aims to identify priority actions for reduction of emissions of contaminants and clean-up, including various heavy metals, persistent organic pollutants, radioactivity, and depletion of the ozone layer. ACAP will offer options for taking action at the national, regional, and global levels to carry this out. Delegations also heard a progress report on a proposal to Ministers to endorse an Arctic

Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA), which aims to be a comprehensive effort by Arctic States to examine the effects of global climate change and increased ultraviolet (UV) radiation on the Arctic region and its inhabitants.

Representatives of the Council's AMAP program and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reported on the progress of the Council's multilateral program to identify and remediate PCB-contaminated sites in the Russian Federation.

Sustainable Development

The Arctic Council's Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) met on April 26. Lead countries and Permanent Participants reported on progress they have made in such areas as improving the health and well-being of Arctic children and youth, managing regional fisheries, assessing prospects for expanded use of telemedicine on a circumpolar basis, and promotion of cultural and eco-tourism in the region.

The SDWG heard presentations and proposals on other health and social welfare issues such as emerging infectious diseases, "Arctic Indigenous Peoples Health and Environment," and a "Comparative Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic." Council members discussed Canada's initiative on "capacity building" which it proposed should be an organizing theme for the future work of the Council, and delegates were updated on developments to establish a circumpolar "University of the Arctic."

Council members discussed a Canadian initiative to bring an Arctic voice to the Rio + 10 process. In addition to progress reports on both on-going and new sustainable development projects, Council members made presentations on sustainable development efforts they believed would be of interest to the Council. Norway gave a presentation on the Northern Sea Route and reported on international workshops it had recently held addressing: "Sustainable Reindeer Herding and Husbandry," "Sustainable Use and Conservation of Living Marine Resources in the Arctic," and "Production of Oil and Gas in the Arctic in a Sustainable Perspective."

Public Awareness, Education and Outreach

A Council priority is public outreach concerning Arctic issues within its mandate. In support of this, Alaska Lieutenant Governor Fran Ulmer hosted a panel discussion on "Contaminants and Human Health" at the University of Alaska which was shown live worldwide over the internet and recorded for later broadcast over Alaska radio and television stations.

Additionally, delegations were briefed on the Arctic Council Web Site [<http://www.arctic-council.org/>], the Arctic Environmental Data Directory, and a possible Arctic Council magazine.

The next Senior Arctic Officials meeting is tentatively scheduled for October 10-11, 2000 in Barrow, Alaska, and will be immediately followed by the U.S.-hosted Ministerial Meeting, in partnership with the North Slope Borough and the State of Alaska. Further information is available from the Arctic Council Secretariat, located in the U.S. Department of State in Washington, DC.