

Joint Communiqué of the Governments of the Arctic Countries

Ministers and senior Representatives of the Governments of Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States of America met in Ottawa, Canada, on September 19, 1996, and signed the Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council.

This inaugural meeting was attended by the leaders and senior representatives of three international Arctic indigenous organizations- the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the Saami Council, and the Association of Indigenous Minorities of the far North, Siberia, and the Far East of the Russian Federation, as Permanent Participants in the Council.

Also present at the signing ceremony were the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region; the Nordic Council Finnish Secretariat; the non-Arctic States of Great Britain, Germany, Japan, Poland and the Netherlands; the International Union for Circumpolar Health; the International Arctic Science Committee; the United Nations Environment Programme; the International Union for the Conservation of Nature; the Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea; and the World Wildlife Fund.

Ministers viewed the establishment of this new intergovernmental forum as an important milestone in their commitment to enhance cooperation in the circumpolar North. The Council will provide a mechanism for addressing the common concerns and the challenges faced by their governments and the people of the Arctic. To this end, Ministers referred particularly to the protection of the Arctic Environment and sustainable development as a means of improving the economic, social and cultural well-being in the North.

Ministers noted that the indigenous people of the Arctic have played an important role in the negotiations to create the Arctic Council. To this end the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the Saami Council, and the Association of Indigenous Minorities of the Far North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation, are named as Permanent Participants in the Arctic Council. Provision is also made for additional organizations representing the Arctic indigenous people to become Permanent Participants.

Ministers acknowledged the significant work accomplished under the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), whose existing programs will be integrated within the Council. They agreed to complete the integration process by the time of the final AEPS Ministerial meeting being held in Norway in 1997.

The Ministers recognized the contribution of international science to the knowledge and understanding of the Arctic region and noted the role that scientific cooperation, through the International Arctic Science Committee and other organizations, is playing in developing a truly circumpolar cooperation.

Ministers welcomed the attendance of the Standing Committee of the Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region and looked forward to its future participation in the meetings of the Council. They also recognized the need for providing the opportunity to non-Arctic

countries, governmental and non-governmental organizations with Arctic interests to participate actively, as observers, in the work of the Council, and to draw on their experience.

Ministers set the initial priority tasks for the start-up of the Council as follows:

developing, for adoption by the Council, rules of procedure;
developing, for adoption by the Council, terms of reference for a sustainable development program as a basis for collaborative projects; and
ensuring an effective transition of the AEPS into the Arctic Council, to be completed at the time of the 1997 AEPS Ministerial meeting in Norway.

Ministers expressed their appreciation to Canada for hosting the inauguration of the Arctic Council, and welcomed Canada's offer to host the first meeting of the Council in 1998.