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The Arctic: Organizations Involved in Circumpolar Cooperation

Publication No. 2008-15-E
1 August 2012

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***The Arctic: Organizations Involved in
Circumpolar Cooperation
(In Brief)***

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THE ARCTIC: ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN CIRCUMPOLAR COOPERATION

1 INTRODUCTION

With some exceptions pertaining to specific issues or regions, cooperation in the North has not been a prominent goal of the international community until relatively recently. However, international cooperation began to evolve rapidly after then Soviet Secretary-General Mikhail Gorbachev delivered a speech in 1987 calling for “a genuine zone of peace and fruitful cooperation” among Arctic states.¹ There is now a plethora of official bodies, both governmental and non-governmental, whose purpose is to manage various issues in the Arctic. Although none has any legal basis as established by, for instance, international treaty, these organizations have assumed an important role in the development of Arctic cooperation. This paper provides information, largely derived from Internet sites, about some of the more important of these organizations, with particular emphasis on the Arctic Council and some domestic Canadian examples.

2 INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

2.1 THE ARCTIC COUNCIL²

The principal body for Arctic cooperation, the Arctic Council was formally established in 1996 with the signing of the Ottawa Declaration by Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faeroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States. The Council serves as a high-level intergovernmental forum to promote cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic states on common issues, particularly those concerning sustainable development and environmental protection.

Arctic Council Ministerial Meetings are held every two years, hosted by the country that holds the chair. The chair coordinates arrangements for the Ministerial Meetings and for the twice-yearly meetings of the Senior Arctic Officials. Since 2010, in the years between Ministerial Meetings, meetings have been held at the deputy ministerial level. The chair is held for the period after the conclusion of one Ministerial Meeting until the conclusion of the next. For the period 2006–2012, the three countries to chair the Arctic Council (Denmark, Norway and Sweden) prepared a set of common objectives and priorities.³ Canada will be chair from 2013 to 2015, followed by the United States.

The Arctic Council also provides for the active involvement of and consultation with indigenous communities and organizations, as well as other Arctic inhabitants, particularly by way of the designation of Permanent Participants,⁴ which include the following:

- Aleut International Association;
- Arctic Athabaskan Council;

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- Gwich'in Council International;
- Inuit Circumpolar Council;
- Saami Council; and
- Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East.

The Arctic Council has its roots in the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), which came into being when the eight Arctic states signed the *Rovaniemi Declaration* in 1991.⁵ The objectives of the Declaration were to:

- protect the Arctic ecosystem, including humans;
- provide for the protection, enhancement and restoration of environmental quality and the sustainable use of natural resources, including by local and indigenous populations;
- recognize and as far as possible seek to accommodate the self-determined traditional and cultural needs, values and practices of Arctic indigenous peoples related to protecting the environment;
- review regularly the state of the Arctic environment; and
- identify, reduce, and, as a final goal, eliminate pollution.⁶

The Arctic Council was created, in part, to oversee and coordinate the programs established under the AEPS. As established by the *Rovaniemi Declaration*, these programs, often referred to by their acronyms, are as follows:

- **Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP):** to monitor levels and assess the effects of anthropogenic pollutants by means of an Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Task Force, with Norway providing a secretariat;
- **Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME):** to take preventive and other measures directly or through competent international organizations regarding marine pollution in the Arctic, regardless of the source;
- **Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR) in the Arctic:** to provide a framework for cooperation in responding to the threat of environmental emergencies; and
- **Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF):** to facilitate information exchange and coordinate research on species and habitats.

With the establishment of the Arctic Council, the programs of the AEPS became “working groups,” and two other groups were added:

- **Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG):** to protect and enhance the economies, culture and health of the inhabitants of the Arctic in an environmentally sustainable manner; and
- **Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP):** to reduce emissions of pollutants into the environment and encourage national governments to take remedial and preventive action relating to contaminants and releases of pollutants.⁷

2.2 THE CONFERENCE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE ARCTIC REGION AND THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE ARCTIC REGION

The Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (CPAR) comprises delegations appointed by the national parliaments of the eight Arctic states and the European Parliament.⁸ The CPAR also includes Permanent Participants representing indigenous peoples, as well as observers. The conference meets every two years, the 10th CPAR having been held in the Akureyri, Iceland, 5–7 September 2012.

Between conferences, Arctic parliamentary cooperation is carried out by the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, which started its activities in 1993. The Conference and Standing Committee take initiatives to further Arctic cooperation, and, in particular, to act as a parliamentary forum to discuss and advance action on issues relevant to the work of the Arctic Council. The Standing Committee takes part in the work of the Council as an observer.

2.3 THE NORTHERN FORUM⁹

Participants at the Third Northern Regions Conference, “Cooperation in a Changing World,” held in Anchorage, Alaska, in 1990, called for a Northern Forum to be established with the objective of “improv[ing] the quality of local, national, and international decision-making regarding northern issues by providing a means through which northern voices can be heard at all stages of the process.” The Northern Forum (NF) was formally established the following year.

The NF is directed by a board of governors consisting of senior political leaders – governors, premiers, presidents and mayors – of member regions and has included the premiers of Alberta, Quebec, Nunavut and Yukon. Membership as a partner to the NF is also available to businesses and to non-profit and non-governmental organizations. The objectives of the NF are to improve the quality of life of northern peoples by providing their regional leaders with a means of sharing knowledge and experience in addressing common challenges, and to support sustainable development and the implementation of cooperative socio-economic initiatives among northern regions and through international fora.

3 EUROPEAN COOPERATION

The four Arctic states that lie within Europe, together with Iceland, which has strong historical ties to Europe, are termed the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden). Much of the cooperation among these states stems from issues surrounding relations with western Russia, the Baltic Sea, the Nordic region and the Barents Sea region. Within the context of the Arctic, cooperation in the West Nordic region between Greenland and Norway and in the Barents Sea north of Norway, Finland and Russia is of paramount importance. The Barents Sea contains radioactive waste from the Soviet fleet, is subject to oil exploration and forms part of the northern sea route across Russia, all of which have consequences for the Arctic.

3.1 THE NORTHERN DIMENSION

The Northern Dimension of European Union (EU) policy¹⁰ was established in the late 1990s as an EU policy intended to deal with issues concerning western Russia, as well as to increase general cooperation among the EU, Iceland and Norway. It has since become a multilateral, equal partnership among the EU, Iceland, Norway and Russia. Canada and the United States are observers to the partnership. In addition, this policy has spawned the Northern Dimension Forum, a regular forum with representation of business and civil society.

The Northern Dimension remains focused on EU relations with western Russia, as it is a regional expression of the four EU/Russia Common Spaces¹¹ with participation of Norway and Iceland. It has six priority areas for cooperation: economic cooperation; freedom, security and justice; external security; research, education and culture; environment, nuclear safety and natural resources; and social welfare and health.¹²

3.2 REGIONAL COUNCILS

Other regional councils have been established to foster cooperation in the European north, of which some, including the following, are partners in the Northern Dimension:

- **Barents Euro-Arctic Council:**¹³ established in 1993 among the countries of the Barents Sea region, specifically Finland, Norway, Sweden and Russia, to promote cooperation in their northernmost parts, primarily with respect to sustainable economic and social development in the region, with the intention of contributing to peaceful development;
- **Council of the Baltic Sea States:**¹⁴ established in 1992 as an intergovernmental forum for the 10 states of the Baltic Sea region¹⁵ and the European Commission; and
- **The Nordic Council of Ministers:**¹⁶ formed in 1971 among the governments of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and Norway and, as well as of Greenland, the Faeroe Islands and Åland, as an intergovernmental forum concerned with a variety of issues. Its work is carried out primarily by the respective Ministers for Nordic Co-operation and the Nordic Committee for Co-operation.

Other notable northern interparliamentary organizations include the **Nordic Council**¹⁷ and the **West Nordic Council**.¹⁸ The Nordic Council was formed in 1952 among members of the national parliaments representing the Nordic countries and autonomous territories. In addition to working on policy issues through committees and political party groups, the Nordic Council meets for plenary discussions with the Nordic ministers at the Council's annual session. Established in 1985, the West Nordic Council is an interparliamentary association of the west Nordic (north Atlantic) region, and includes the parliaments of Denmark, the Faeroe Islands, Greenland and Iceland. It is concerned with a variety of issues affecting the region, but in particular with resource management. It also represents the region in its interactions with the Nordic Council and other Nordic organizations.

4 INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' ORGANIZATIONS¹⁹

4.1 INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR COUNCIL

Founded in 1977, the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)²⁰ is now a major international non-governmental organization representing approximately 150,000 Inuit in Alaska, Canada, Chukotka (Russia) and Greenland. The ICC has Consultative Status II (now referred to as Special Consultative Status) with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, reflecting its recognized standing and special competence in indigenous issues. Its principal goals are to:

- strengthen unity among Inuit of the circumpolar region;
- promote Inuit rights and interests on an international level;
- develop and encourage long-term policies that safeguard the Arctic environment; and
- seek full and active partnership in the political, economic and social development of circumpolar regions.

The ICC holds a General Assembly every four years that is also attended by representatives from the Inuit Circumpolar Youth Council and the International Elders Council. Its chair and eight-member Executive Council are elected to four-year mandates at the General Assembly. The next General Assembly is scheduled for 2014.

4.2 SAAMI COUNCIL

The Saami Council was established in 1956 as a non-governmental organization of Saami member organizations from Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden.²¹ Its primary goals are to promote Saami economic, social and cultural rights and interests in the four countries where the Saami reside, as well as to promote and protect the Saami national identity. These objectives are achieved through agreements between the states and the bodies representing the Saami people, i.e., the Saami parliaments: "Saami Council renders opinions and makes proposals on questions concerning Saami people's rights, language and culture and especially on issues concerning Saami in different countries."²²

4.3 INUIT TAPIRIIT KANATAMI

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK, formerly the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada)²³ was founded in 1971 as the national organization representing and promoting the interests of Canada's Inuit. The ITK represents and promotes the interests of Inuit on a wide variety of environmental, social, cultural, and political issues and challenges facing Inuit on the national level.

4.4 RUSSIAN ASSOCIATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE NORTH, SIBERIA AND FAR EAST

The Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East (RAIPON)²⁴ was created in 1990 at the First Congress of Indigenous Peoples of the North. Today, it unites 41 indigenous groups comprising 250,000 people represented by 34 regional and ethnic organizations. Its goal is to protect the human rights and legal interests of the indigenous peoples in the northern, Siberian and far eastern regions of Russia, and to promote solutions to environmental, social and economic problems, as well as problems of cultural development and education. RAIPON is particularly concerned with guaranteeing the protection of native homelands and traditional ways of life as well as the right to self-governance according to national and international legal standards.

5 RESEARCH COOPERATION

5.1 INTERNATIONAL ARCTIC SCIENCE COMMITTEE²⁵

Comprising national science organizations covering all fields of Arctic research, the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) was established in 1990, began operations in 1991 and today involves 18 member countries. The IASC's mission is to encourage, facilitate and promote basic and applied interdisciplinary research in or concerned with the Arctic at a circumpolar or international level; and to provide scientific advice on arctic issues.

5.2 UNIVERSITY OF THE ARCTIC²⁶

The University of the Arctic (UArctic) is a cooperative network of universities, colleges and other organizations²⁷ committed to higher education and research in the North. UArctic is a decentralized organization whose offices, programs and other functions are hosted at member institutions in the circumpolar North. Its members share resources, facilities and expertise to develop post-secondary educational programs that are relevant and accessible to northern students. Its overall goal is to foster the development of a strong, sustainable circumpolar region by empowering northerners and northern communities through education and shared knowledge. UArctic promotes interdisciplinary, diverse education that uses the network's combined strengths to address the unique challenges of the circumpolar region. It recognizes the integral role of indigenous peoples in northern education and seeks to engage their perspectives in all of its activities.

5.3 CANADIAN POLAR COMMISSION²⁸

The Canadian Polar Commission was established in 1991 as the lead agency in the area of polar research. It has responsibility for monitoring, promoting and disseminating knowledge of the Polar Regions, raising public awareness of the importance of polar science to the national interest, enhancing Canada's international profile as a circumpolar nation, and advising the government on future

directions for polar science policy. The Commission hosts conferences and workshops, publishes information of relevance to polar research, and works closely with other governmental and non-governmental agencies to promote and support Canadian study of the Polar Regions.

5.4 THE INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CIRCUMPOLAR HEALTH²⁹

Formally established in 1981, the International Union for Circumpolar Health (IUCH) is a non-governmental organization with members, adhering bodies and affiliates throughout the circumpolar region. Its focus is the health problems and needs of northern peoples. Its functions include disseminating medical knowledge, research findings and demonstrated solutions to the general and specific medical and health problems of Arctic communities. To support its members and affiliates, and the scientific and indigenous communities at large, the IUCH has established working groups that concentrate on specific health problems of importance to circumpolar populations, maintains several publications, and supports international efforts in telemedicine and health informatics.

5.5 INTERNATIONAL POLAR YEAR³⁰

The International Polar Year (IPY) was a large scientific program focused on the Arctic and the Antarctic. An important aspect of its activities is the legacy of information and organization in the Polar Regions. One of the most significant efforts in this regard is concerned with the creation of a Sustained Arctic Observation Network to meet scientific and societal needs. The Arctic Council recommended the creation of such a network in its 2006 *Salekhard Declaration*. The Swedish and Canadian IPY committees took the lead in launching this initiative.

The IPY was organized through the International Council for Science and the World Meteorological Organization. It followed in the tradition of other such events in 1882–1883, 1932–1933 and 1957–1958. To achieve full and equal coverage of both the Arctic and the Antarctic, IPY 2007–2008 covered two annual cycles from March 2007 to March 2009 and involved over 200 projects, engaging thousands of scientists from over 60 nations in the examination of a wide range of physical, biological and social research topics. Canada was a lead participating country, the federal government having committed \$150 million to the IPY. The final event of the IPY was the conference entitled *From Knowledge to Action*,³¹ held in Montréal, Canada, 22–27 April 2012. Following Ministerial support shown in the Arctic Council's 2011 Nuuk declaration, work has proceeded on an International Polar Decade Initiative.

NOTES

1. See Timo Koivurova and David Vanderzwaag, "[The Arctic Council at 10 Years: Retrospect and Prospects](#)," *University of British Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 40, 2007, pp. 121–194.
2. For information, see the [Arctic Council website](#).

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3. Arctic Council, "[Common Objectives](#)."
4. Arctic Council, "[Permanent Participants](#)."
5. First Ministerial Conference on the Protection of the Arctic Environment, [Rovaniemi Declaration: Declaration on the Protection of the Arctic Environment](#), 14 June 1991.
6. Ibid., p. 9.
7. For more information on the working groups and current activities, see Arctic Council, "[Working Groups](#)."
8. For further information, see the Conference of Parliamentarians of the [Arctic Region website](#).
9. For further information, see the [Northern Forum website](#).
10. Sometimes referred to simply as the Northern Dimension. This is not to be confused with the Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy.
11. In May 2003, the EU and Russia agreed to reinforce their cooperation by creating, in the long term, and on the basis of common values and shared interests, four "common spaces" in the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. These are as follows:
 - the Common Economic Space, covering economic issues and the environment;
 - the Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice;
 - the Common Space of External Security, including crisis management and non-proliferation; and
 - the Common Space of Research and Education, including cultural aspects.
12. [Northern Dimension Policy Framework Document](#).
13. Barents Euro-Arctic Council, "[Background](#)."
14. Council of the Baltic Sea States, "[History](#)."
15. Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden.
16. Norden, "[The Nordic Council of Ministers](#)," 26 March 2008.
17. Norden, "[About the Nordic Council](#)."
18. For information, see the [West Nordic Council website](#).
19. More information regarding the six indigenous peoples' organizations that are permanent participants on the [Arctic Council website](#).
20. For information on the Inuit Circumpolar Council (Canada) and links to other country websites, see the [ICC\(C\) homepage](#).
21. See Saami Council, "[Briefly](#)."
22. Ibid.
23. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "[About ITK](#)."
24. For information on RAIPON, see the [association's website](#).
25. For information, see the [International Arctic Science Committee website](#).
26. For information, see the [University of the Arctic website](#).
27. A list of participating organizations is available on the [University of the Arctic website](#).
28. For information, see the [Canadian Polar Commission website](#).
29. For information, see the [International Union for Circumpolar Health website](#).
30. See the [International Polar Year website](#) (not being updated, but still available).
31. IPY, 2012, Conference, [From Knowledge to Action](#).