

arctic 2000-2002

■ PROGRAM FOR THE FINNISH CHAIR OF
THE ARCTIC COUNCIL 2000-2002

■ ПРОГРАММА НА ПЕРИОД
ПРЕДСЕДАТЕЛЬСТВОВАНИЯ ФИНЛЯНДИИ
В АРКТИЧЕСКОМ СОВЕТЕ В 2000-2002 гг.

MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF FINLAND

**PROGRAM FOR THE FINNISH CHAIR
OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL 2000-2002**





Dear Friends of the Arctic,

In June 1991, representatives of eight countries bordering the Arctic convened in Rovaniemi to discuss the challenges related to the Arctic environment and population. The meeting was a springboard for Arctic cooperation: the first Declaration concerning the Arctic and the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy were adopted and four working groups for the environment were set up. This cooperation forms the principal framework within which the Arctic Council was established in 1996.

A number of excellent reports on the state of the Arctic environment have been produced by expert groups subordinate to the Arctic Council, available to governments, the UN, international bodies specialising in the protection of the environment, universities and schools. Even if the Arctic environmental cooperation has already yielded concrete results, there is a vast amount of work and challenging tasks ahead of us also in the future.

Finland is starting its term as the chair of the Council preoccupied with our constant cause of anxiety, the vulnerability of the Arctic environment. The repercussions of the climate change are far-reaching not only in the Arctic region but also globally. Poisonous substances accumulate in food chains and eventually in breast milk. All our activities must be based on appreciation of the link between the environment and the people, and of the knowledge of the indigenous peoples and other people living in the region. Attention should be paid on not only the ecological dimension but also the social, cultural and economic dimensions of sustainable development. The results of the various reports that have been made must lead us to draw conclusions with a practical significance.

This brochure gives a presentation of the priorities and objectives adopted by the Government of Finland for our chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2000-2002. The composition of the Arctic Council is unique. Representatives of indigenous peoples convene around the same table with representatives of the governments of the member states. Several observers, states, international organisations and non-governmental organisations bring their contributions to the activities of the Council. Each of the actors plays a key role in efforts to arrive at sustainable results.

Best wishes,

Erkki Tuomioja
Minister for Foreign Affairs

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1. Background

International Arctic co-operation started in the field of environmental protection, in accordance with the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) adopted in Rovaniemi, Finland, in June 1991. Based on this “Rovaniemi process”, the Arctic Council was established by a Declaration of eight Arctic states at their Ministerial Meeting in Ottawa in September 1996. With the establishment of the Arctic Council, environmental issues and sustainable development became key elements in the Council’s sphere of activities.

The Arctic Council has eight member states: the five Nordic countries, Canada, the Russian Federation and the United States. For bodies representing indigenous peoples the Council has a separate category of Permanent Participants. Representatives of indigenous peoples sit at the same table with the member states’ representatives, participating in the proceedings but without power of decision-making. Moreover, the Council has Observers: states, international organizations and non-governmental organizations. At present, Germany, Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Poland are Observer states.

According to the Ottawa Declaration, the Arctic Council is a high-level forum for the Arctic states charged with promoting Arctic issues, particularly sustainable development and environmental protection. Moreover, the Council distributes information, encourages education and stimulates interest in Arctic questions.

2. Finland’s priorities during its chairmanship

• Making the Arctic Council a mouthpiece for the Arctic

So far, the Arctic Council has been a somewhat low-profile player in the international arena. It has not yet clearly adopted the role of mouthpiece for the Arctic circumpolar region. The Ottawa Declaration provides a rather limited framework for the Council’s activities but through various international organizations and agreements development in the Arctic is being efficiently influenced. The Arctic Council cannot, however, represent its member states in international negotiations.

Nevertheless, the Arctic Council can actively inform international bodies about the results of its work. When holding the chair of the Council,

Finland will aim at strengthening the Council's role as a promoter of Arctic issues in international co-operation. The Council's relations with other regional bodies, such as the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the UN agencies, should be put on a regular basis, and a division of work based on each body's competence should be agreed to avoid overlaps.

During its chairmanship Finland will aim at raising the Arctic Council's profile as a promoter of Arctic issues of global significance in relation to other international institutions.

During the Finnish chairmanship the Council will also examine how its information activities should be improved to strengthen its external image.

- **Making the European Union an Arctic co-operation partner**

4 The work of the Arctic Council would be more fruitful if the Observers were actively involved in the Council's work and in its presentation to interest groups. The European Commission would be a particularly valuable partner to the Arctic Council. According to the EU's Action Plan for the Northern Dimension, the Commission may create contacts with the Arctic Council in order to strengthen Arctic knowledge and co-operation. Also, Japan would be a good potential partner at governmental level.

As the Host Country of the Arctic Council, Finland will promote co-operation between the Council and the EU. The intention is to put this co-operation on a regular basis so that the Commission becomes a permanent Observer in the Council.

- **Rationalizing the Council's work**

The co-operation among the eight Arctic states has continued for so long — almost ten years — that its structures should be evaluated critically, with a view to streamlining them. This is particularly important in the field of environmental co-operation. As the Arctic Council's activities have become regularized, it has become necessary to adapt its structure and programs so that they better meet the requirements of co-operation. As for environmental programs, an urgent evaluation is required because of the drafting of the Arctic Council Action Plan to Eliminate Pollution of the Arctic (ACAP). The Action Plan was adopted by the Barrow Ministerial Meeting.

As the Host Country, Finland is responsible for making a review of the Council's organization, with recommendations for action to be taken. The review and the recommendations are to be presented to the Ministerial Meeting in 2002.

- **Intensifying the protection of the Arctic environment**

According to the Declaration establishing the Arctic Council, it promotes, oversees and coordinates the four programs of the Rovaniemi Process, instituted under the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy. These programs are the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP), the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME), and Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPPR).

In June 2001, ten years will have passed since the Rovaniemi Process started. The tenth anniversary will be celebrated in connection with the

first Senior Arctic Officials meeting during Finland's chairmanship, in June 2001 in Rovaniemi. This occasion provides a good opportunity to evaluate environmental co-operation and analyze its future prospects.

The United States has led the preparation of a program on the monitoring of Arctic climate change and UV radiation (Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, ACIA). This program was adopted by the Barrow Ministerial Meeting. According to the program, climate change will be assessed by 2004. Until that time, the United States will lead the project and bear the Secretariat's costs. The program is significant for the whole Arctic region and for research on global climate change.

Finland aims at ensuring the progress of the Environmental Protection Strategy by supporting various environmental programs. It is particularly important to implement more efficiently the recommendations based on environmental reports. Finland will actively support the ACIA Climate Program launched under the leadership of the previous Host Country.

• Clarifying actions in support of sustainable development

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Alongside environmental protection, **sustainable development** is another focus of the Arctic Council. It has been the most problematic area of co-operation in the four-year history of the Council, because disagreement about the right approach to this issue between the United States, on the one hand, and the Nordic countries and Canada, on the other, has hampered the Council's work. The Nordic countries and Canada have underlined the importance of a strategic approach. According to them, actions need, first of all, a clear strategy, the principles of which shall determine the criteria that steer the work. The United States has emphasized a project-oriented approach by addressing proposals concerning this sector on the bottom-up principle.

The Council has made efforts to build a bridge between the two different approaches by preparing a "cap" of general principles for the Program on Sustainable Development. A jointly produced paper of principles for the Program on Sustainable Development was submitted to the Barrow Ministerial Meeting and approved by the ministers. Besides holding the overall chair of the Arctic Council, Finland also holds the chair of the Sustainable Development Working Group.

Finland aims at consolidating the Council's work on sustainable development. At the Rio + 10 follow-up meeting of the UN in 2002, the Arctic Council should be able to present its activities to support sustainable development.

• Arctic research and the University of the Arctic — central priorities

The Finnish Arctic scientific community is actively involved in the scientific networks of the Arctic. During its chairmanship, Finland will promote research on the Arctic as well as activities of international Arctic research organizations, particularly those of the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC).

The first Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council was held in Iqaluit, Canada, in 1998. This meeting expressed support for the project to establish a University of the Arctic. The University of the Arctic, "a university without walls", is based on promotion of Arctic tertiary education by making use of new information technologies. Finland has actively advanced the university project and, in the preparatory phase, paid for its secretariat services in Rovaniemi. Now the project has advanced so far that the University can start working officially in June 2001. The

University is not subordinate to the Arctic Council but informs the Council regularly of its activities. In connection with the university project, Arctic research institutes have been constituting the Northern Research Forum, which will hold its first conference in Akureyri, Iceland, in November 2000.

During its chairmanship Finland will promote Arctic research and develop the University of the Arctic. The official opening of the University will be announced in connection with the first Senior Arctic Officials meeting during the Finnish chairmanship.

- **Projects promoting economic and social development**

As the Host Country of the Arctic Council, Finland aims at promoting circumpolar issues concerning the entire Arctic. For issues that are geographically less extensive, Nordic or Barents regional co-operation, for instance, provides a more appropriate forum.

6 Finland aims at promoting diverse use of information technologies. Within Arctic co-operation, new information technologies are already being applied, for example in higher education (the University of the Arctic) and telemedicine.

In the health sector Finland will advance ongoing co-operation, paying particular attention to the prevention of communicable diseases and to the connection between the environment and health, in such contexts as the AMAP (Arctic Monitoring and Assessment) program.

Issues of gender equality have not yet been addressed within the Arctic Council although equality has been promoted, inter alia, in networks of women from indigenous communities. The Nordic Council of Ministers has experience and expertise in this field. **Finland will take up issues related to the position of women and gender equality in the work of the Arctic Council.**

As the chair of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), Finland has launched successful co-operation concerning youth and youth policy in the Barents region. In youth policy, **Finland will use its experience of Barents co-operation as a basis for starting similar action within the Arctic Council.** At the same time, Finland will also seek connections with the project on Arctic children and youth proposed by Canada.

As for sustainable development, ecological, social and economic viewpoints should be considered. From the economic point of view, the Council's contribution has been modest. In the promotion of Arctic circumpolar development it is crucially important to improve traffic and transport infrastructure. The Barents Euro-Arctic Council has a Steering Committee for the development of the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area and a Working Group on the Northern Sea Route. When chairing the Arctic Council, **Finland will also take up transport issues. At the first stage, views will be exchanged on different ways of developing transport in the Arctic. For its own part, Finland will particularly highlight the work done to develop the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area. From the Transarctic viewpoint it is important to develop air and sea transport.**

Apart from the natural conditions of the Arctic, its different cultures also shape the identity of the Arctic population groups. **Finland will promote knowledge of the Arctic cultures** and the interaction between these cultures and other regions and population groups. On the initiative of Alaska, the Arctic Council has launched a tourism project on eco-culture. **Finland aims at strengthening co-operation on tourism that supports sustainable development, by utilizing and co-ordinating the work done in this field by other bodies, such as the WWF and the Northern Forum (see below).**

During the Canadian chairmanship, the Council took its first steps to promote sustainable forestry. **Finland aims at reactivating and expanding circumpolar co-operation in the field of forestry**, learning from the lessons of Barents co-operation and avoiding overlaps. In applying the principle of sustainable development and in protection and research, efforts will be made to develop industries, improve the subsistence of local inhabitants and strengthen the viability of communities.

On the initiative of Norway, the Council is launching a project on sustainable reindeer management. **Finland contributes to the development of basic industries in the Arctic by strengthening, inter alia, sustainable reindeer management, related product development and processing as well as training in this field.**

4. Consideration of indigenous peoples and strengthening of regional participation

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In the introduction to the Declaration establishing the Arctic Council, the governments of eight Arctic states affirm their commitment to the well-being of the inhabitants of the Arctic, by recognizing the special relationship to the Arctic of indigenous peoples and their communities.

This special relationship has been taken into account in many ways in the structures and co-operation of the Arctic Council. **In the spirit of the Declaration, Finland, as the Host Country, aims at strengthening the participation of inhabitants and indigenous peoples of the Arctic in the development of Arctic co-operation.** Finland pays particular attention to improving the living conditions of indigenous peoples, developing human resources, supporting cultures and improving social conditions.

The Arctic Council should strengthen co-operation at regional level and enhance the Council's interaction with the Arctic. For co-operation among northern regions, the **Northern Forum** has been established. The co-operation involves the northern regions of all Arctic states and some parts of Japan, China, Mongolia and South Korea. The Northern Forum has observer status in the Arctic Council. **Co-operation between the Council and the Forum should be enhanced.**

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As the Host Country of the Arctic Council, much is expected of Finland. It can fulfill these expectations only through close co-operation with all other member states and Permanent Participants as well as Observers. The Council's work, based as it is on consensus, can be strengthened only if all parties concerned wish it to be, by reconciling their divergent viewpoints.