



For Immediate Release

Arctic Council ministers meeting concludes, United States is well represented

Wednesday, May 18, 2011 – The Arctic Council wrapped up its 7th meeting of foreign ministers on May 12th in Greenland. The U.S. delegation was lead by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and included Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar, Alaska’s senior Senator Lisa Murkowski, and Alaska Lieutenant Governor Mead Treadwell. This is the first time the U.S. has sent such a high level delegation to the gathering underscoring increasing global interest in the Arctic.

Inuit were also well represented, including: Kuupik Kleist, Premier of Greenland, who headed the Danish delegation; and Leona Aglukkaq, Canada’s Health Minister, who headed the Canadian delegation. Eva Ariak, Premier of Nunavut, and Floyd Roland, Premier of the Northwest Territories, sat together with Aglukark. The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) had a seat at the head table with ministers through its permanent participant status. ICC has been active in the work of the Arctic Council since its inception in 1996.

One day prior to the meeting, ICC launched an Inuit declaration on Arctic resource development. “It is in that declaration that they will find the way forward on how Inuit are prepared to forge partnerships with those coming to our Inuit homeland”, stated Duane Smith, President of ICC Canada. With increased interest in industrial development in the Arctic Ocean as a result of loss of sea ice due to climate change, Inuit felt compelled to state their conditions for development, including oil and gas activities, mining, marine shipping, and commercial fishing. ICC supports development that is sustainable and provides real benefit to Inuit.

ICC endorsed the formation of the Arctic Council oil spill task force to address prevention, preparedness and response to oil spills. This initiative was proposed by the U.S. and Sweden, and will be focused on during the upcoming two year term of Sweden’s chairmanship of the Arctic Council. “We depend on a healthy ecosystem to sustain our culture and well-being ... and we depend on the living resources of the sea, and expect the most stringent regulations to be developed and applied”, stated Aqqaluk Lyngse, Chairman of ICC, in his address to the ministers.

The ministers decided to create a permanent secretariat in Tromso, Norway and establish procedures for states and organizations interested in becoming observers to the Arctic Council in a move to strengthen it. All ministers reiterated that the Arctic Council is the premier forum for developing policy in the region.

Ministers reviewed the work of the Arctic Council’s working groups during the preceding two year term of the Danish chairmanship, signed a binding search and rescue agreement, and pledged to work together closely on transboundary matters. The meeting concluded with the signing of the Nuuk Declaration which provides direction to the Arctic Council’s work for the next two years.

According to Jim Stotts, President of ICC Alaska, “The prime indicator for a healthy Arctic must be the health and well-being of Arctic peoples. Healthy northern communities with access to clean safe food, and uncontaminated air and water are prerequisite to a healthy Arctic. Arctic cultures must be able to thrive as they have for centuries.”

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