



Press Release – Inuit at Arctic Council meeting in Whitehorse call for more meaningful involvement of Inuit in the Council’s expanding work

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Whitehorse, Yukon – The Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) of the 8-state Arctic Council met here this week to map out the major activities to be addressed during the 2-year Canadian chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

After the meeting was opened by the Canadian Chair of the Arctic Council, Minister Leona Aglukkaq, it was noted by SAO Chair, Patrick Borbey, that the expanding scope of the Arctic Council now finds itself with over 85 ongoing initiatives.

“The growth of interest in the Arctic, and the corresponding growth of the Arctic Council, is great but it means that new challenges are presented to the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) to meaningfully represent the interests of Inuit at the community level”, said Duane Smith. Mr. Smith, who is heading up ICC’s delegation in Whitehorse, is also the president of ICC Canada.

Mr. Smith cited the example of a mental wellness project, discussed in Whitehorse that will look at innovative ways to promote resilience and address the issue of suicide prevention across the Arctic. “We believe this work must be done, but we also believe it must be done right. I have been clear in Whitehorse that this sensitive issue can only be addressed properly if Inuit have meaningful involvement, both here at the Arctic Council and at the community level.”

ICC Alaska president, Jim Stotts, echoed this sentiment in the context of the proposed Circumpolar Business Forum. “We Inuit support a forum that promotes development that is sustainable and supportive of Inuit interests, but we need the resources and the time to make sure our input is meaningful.”

ICC Greenland president, Carl Christian Olsen, said the presence of China, India, South Korea and many other newly-accepted Permanent Observers at the Whitehorse meeting demonstrated the importance of Inuit being ready for “both the new Arctic and the newly-expanded Arctic Council”.

Mr. Smith concluded by saying that the answer to the challenge is simple: “you will find overall success where Inuit are fully engaged in a meaningful way, including project design”. He called upon the Arctic states to help make this happen.

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