



**Inuit Circumpolar Council
Ministerial Statement
Presented by Jimmy Stotts
20 May 2021
Reykjavik, Iceland**

A Need to Focus on Indigenous Priorities

Excellencies, Colleagues, Friends.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is glad to join in the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Arctic Council. We wish more of us could be there in person, but unfortunately the COVID-19 pandemic has its consequences.

Those people that have been engaged in this endeavor over the past 25 years have much to be proud of. The six working groups, various task forces, and different expert groups have accomplished a great body of work since the Council was formally created in 1996, in Ottawa. Our hats off to the many Senior Arctic Officials and Permanent Participants for pushing significant policy recommendations forward for adoption by the Ministers of the eight Arctic states over the past two and a half decades.

The ICC is pleased to note the passage of an Arctic Council Strategic Plan which was long overdue. The Icelandic chairmanship should be applauded for their efforts in steering this Strategic Plan over the finish line.

After a slight setback, the Council has returned to its original objective of trying to balance sustainable development and protection of the environment. I spoke to this body two years ago in Rovaniemi of the need to find that balance. ICC believes the Arctic Council is still attempting to find that balance. Thankfully, global climate change is once again back on the agenda.

There are people living in the Arctic. People desiring a healthy environment with safe food, air and water. People desiring economic opportunity to provide for their families. People desiring to practice their way of life. It comes down to finding that



balance between development and conservation. It also comes down to a respect for other cultures, with different perspectives and different priorities.

Inuit have concerns with the proliferation of marine protected areas. We need to be engaged in the planning, creation and management of those protected areas that are located near or within our homelands. We need guaranteed access to those protected areas to practice our way of life and to those resources that we depend on for nutritional and cultural survival. We will not be separated from our food and our culture.

We also have concerns over recent attempts by some that would limit our ability to hunt for food to feed our families. We will not be excluded from discussions and decisions on how our food resources should be monitored and managed. We must be an integral part of any Arctic wildlife management schemes that may be developed. We will not accept our culture being outlawed. There cannot be any compromise on this.

We strongly encourage the Arctic Council to join with Inuit on developing policy recommendations to address our concerns on these two issues. We challenge those organizations concerned with environmental conservation and biodiversity to recognize the rights of the Arctic's First Peoples to food security and cultural survival. You know who you are, and if we must, we will call you out.

ICC is encouraged to note that the first topic in the Reykjavik Declaration is "People and Communities of the Arctic". This did not happen by accident, there was some jockeying around on the order of topics during the negotiation of the Declaration. Much of the discussion was about whether development or conservation should be first. We are glad that Arctic peoples and communities ended up first this time. We believe this is the way it should be.

We believe people should live within, and in collaboration with, nature. Our viewpoint often conflicts with the perspective of the dominant society that believes mankind can control nature. That approach has been disastrous for the Arctic and the rest of the planet. We have another perspective, a different viewpoint that could greatly benefit what the Arctic Council hopes to accomplish.



Participation is one thing, having influence is another. What good is participation if no one listens and our concerns are not being paid the attention we think they should be. The current situation within the Arctic Council has become a concern for us. The term meaningful engagement has a different meaning for the Arctic states than it does for the Permanent Participants.

ICC would like to see the Arctic Council address some of the priorities important to us: food security and management of wildlife and their habitat; the infrastructure and social services deficit in our communities; environmental health issues; cultural survival; and real meaningful engagement. It's time to use Indigenous Knowledge together with science as called for twenty-five years ago.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council has always supported the idea of the Arctic as a peaceful region. In the past, we have advocated the Arctic should be a nuclear free zone. We are concerned over the level of recent angry and provocative rhetoric from some of the Arctic states. We do not want to see our homeland turned into a region of competition and conflict. We don't wish to see our world overrun with other peoples' problems.

We express our thanks to the Icelandic team for their strong effort leading the organization during their chairmanship. They did a great job during the added burden of the COVID-19 pandemic. We pledge our support to the Russian chairmanship and promise to work hard to ensure its success.

Thank you for this opportunity.