



Inuit Circumpolar Council Position Paper

Safeguarding and Strengthening the Arctic Council

4 June 2024

“ICC has worked hard for the establishment of the Arctic Council. We take our place at the Arctic Council as a distinct people, with our own language, culture, values, traditions, homelands and the right of self-determination.”¹

HIGHLIGHTED RECOMMENDATIONS and ACTION ITEMS

- 1. Arctic Council governance must be strengthened through member states’ consistent support and accountability to Indigenous Peoples’ Organizations that serve as Permanent Participants.²**
- 2. Continuously strengthen youth engagement in the Arctic Council.**
- 3. Create a safe and welcoming environment for Arctic Indigenous Peoples and fully recognize Indigenous Knowledge³ in all Arctic Council Working Groups and Expert Groups.**
- 4. Replace tokenism with full and effective participation and meaningful engagement of Indigenous Peoples throughout the Arctic Council.**
- 5. Build a common understanding of why it is important that Indigenous Peoples are part of the Arctic Council.**
- 6. Create space, capacity and secure funding for Inuit-led research initiatives.**

¹ Rosemary Kuptana, President, Inuit Circumpolar Conference. Opening remarks at the Arctic Council Inauguration Signing Ceremony, Ottawa, Canada. 19 September 1996.

² Permanent Participant is a political definition and refers to the six Indigenous Peoples Organizations seated at the Arctic Council.

³ The use of the term “Indigenous Knowledge” reflects language used at the Arctic Council and should be read to mean that Indigenous Peoples possess collective rights and collective ownership of their knowledge. As stated in the [Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement](#): “Indigenous Knowledge guides our understandings of, and relationships with, everything. Our knowledge cannot be separated out from our identity, our values, spirituality and worldviews.” Page 15.

Introduction

As a co-founder, the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) was instrumental in the development of the Arctic Council – an historic and important consensus-based body for Arctic collaboration. As an Indigenous Peoples’ Organization with Permanent Participant status, the ICC strongly advocates for the continued development and strengthening of the Arctic Council in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the principles laid out in the *Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement*.⁴

ICC’s fundamental goals are to be the united voice of Inuit in promoting Inuit rights and interests at the international level, to ensure Inuit full and effective participation and meaningful engagement in political, economic and social institutions, to ensure the sustainability of Inuit culture and societies for present and future generations, and to promote long-term management and protection of Arctic and sub-Arctic wildlife, environment, biological diversity and Inuit ways of life, as well as, promoting wise management of Arctic non-renewable resources.⁵

*“We reaffirm our interdependent, interrelated, interconnected, and indivisible rights as affirmed by the United Nations (UN) in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), including our right to self-determination, which is the pre-requisite for the exercise and enjoyment of all of our human rights as Arctic Indigenous Peoples”.*⁶

The Arctic Council must evolve in a direction that further enhances the role of Inuit and other Indigenous Peoples and supports our inherent right to self-determination, affirming ICC’s position to ensure full and effective participation and meaningful engagement of Inuit as represented by ICC in the Arctic Council.

When the ‘pause’ in the Arctic Council was introduced by seven member states, ICC expressed concerns about the Arctic Council’s future, emphasizing its foundation of peaceful cooperation and mutual respect. ICC monitored the situation closely and supports the steps and modalities taken to allow the continuation of the work of the Arctic Council. While normal operations of the Arctic Council continue to be challenged, ICC acknowledges the importance of developing a new and innovative approach to governance reform that not only addresses these challenges, but strengthens the representation and influence of Inuit and other Arctic Indigenous Peoples within the Arctic Council.

Successive ICC declarations, position papers and policy documents have emphasized the importance of the Arctic Council. The Inuit Circumpolar Council 2022 Ilulissat Declaration, approved at the last ICC General Assembly, states:

Affirming that the Inuit Circumpolar Council is one of the founding Arctic Council Permanent Participants and we must remain an integral part of this regional organization. We express our deep concern about the current pause and call for a resolution,

Asserting that international instruments, intergovernmental fora, and Arctic specific developments that have or may in the future impact our communities, must ensure our direct participation in procedural

⁴ <https://www.inuitcircumpolar.com/wp-content/uploads/EEE-Protocols-LR-WEB.pdf>

⁵ Inuit Circumpolar Council Charter, Article 3.

⁶ Statement of the Arctic Peoples’ Conference 2023

and substantive aspects, including the Arctic Council, United Nations' entities and specialized agencies, and all other intergovernmental organizations that we deem relevant,

Instruct ICC Executive Council to continue to evaluate and strategize ways to use the Arctic Council as a key arena to further the interests of Inuit and to strengthen the unique role of ICC as a Permanent Participant in the Arctic Council.

Agree to continue to participate directly in discussions on safety and security of Arctic shipping, environmental regulations and guidelines concerning marine and atmospheric pollution and disturbances by ships, and implementation of the Polar Code and Polar Code 2 deliberations consistent with our participation at the Arctic Council and our new consultative status within the International Maritime Organization.⁷

These paragraphs highlight the importance of the Arctic Council for ICC and underscore the foundational role Inuit played in its formation, the need for which was addressed at the first Arctic Peoples' Conference in Copenhagen in 1973. Inuit and other Arctic Indigenous Peoples made a strong case for full and effective participation and meaningful engagement in Arctic decision-making decades before we directly took part in the establishment of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy and, later, the Arctic Council.

The *1996 Ottawa Declaration* emphasized the important role of Arctic Indigenous Peoples, and the presence of the Permanent Participants has been cited in all of the Council's Ministerial declarations and used by member states to demonstrate their commitment to Arctic Indigenous Peoples and the unique structure of the Arctic Council. Indeed, through the efforts of ICC and other Permanent Participants, the *2021 Reykjavik Declaration* recognized "the rights and the special circumstances of Indigenous Peoples and the unique role of the Permanent Participants within the Arctic Council and [noted] the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."⁸ This commitment is also reflected in the *Arctic Council Strategic Plan 2021 to 2030*, which states the Council will "promote respect for Arctic Indigenous Peoples, taking due note of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."⁹

As the Inuit Circumpolar Council 2022 Ilulissat Declaration highlights, the current situation has affected the operation of the Arctic Council, and the agreed upon written procedures put Inuit and all Permanent Participants at a disadvantage. ICC thus fully supports a gradual resumption of online meetings of Working Groups and projects of the Arctic Council. The ICC expects to have full access and be an integral part of all decision-making processes in the Arctic Council, at all levels of its work, and will continuously advocate for Permanent Participants' right to vote at all levels of the Arctic Council in the future.

ICC's recommended action items to safeguard and strengthen the Arctic Council

Improvements to the Arctic Council's governance structure can be enhanced by ethical and equitable engagement of Inuit and other Indigenous Peoples, and by their full and effective participation in decision-making through their status as Permanent Participants. This is in keeping with the 11 May 2023 Arctic Council Statement on the Occasion of the 13th Meeting of the Arctic Council which acknowledges "the commitment to work to safeguard and strengthen the Arctic Council...." and recognizes "the rights of Arctic

⁷ Inuit Circumpolar Council 2022 Ilulissat Declaration <https://iccalaska.org/wp-icc/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ICC-2022-Ilulissat-Declaration-ENG.pdf>

⁸ <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/b8fe81c0-265c-4920-ac82-1eac0754b960/content>

⁹ <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/118e0bce-9013-460a-81e0-1dbd0870ee05/content>

Indigenous Peoples and the unique role of the Permanent Participants in the Arctic Council....”¹⁰ These suggestions have been conveyed in meetings and in writing to the Norwegian Chair, and ICC believes their resolution is fundamental to the future of the Arctic Council.

All of the following action items support ICC’s strategy and plan for implementing the Inuit Circumpolar Council 2022 Ilulissat Declaration to ensure that all Arctic Council Working Groups and Expert Groups acknowledge and commit to the full and effective participation and meaningful engagement of Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge in all of the Arctic Council’s processes.

1) Arctic Council governance must be strengthened through member states’ consistent support and accountability to Indigenous Peoples’ Organizations that serve as Permanent Participants

The Arctic Council boasts a unique consensus-based structure, yet recent years have revealed a troubling trend: Arctic states easily excluded Permanent Participants from crucial discussions. This violates the founding principles and jeopardizes the Arctic Council’s coherence, setting a dangerous precedent that must be swiftly halted.

ICC and other Permanent Participants assert their right to full and consistent representation in all Arctic Council proceedings, from Ministerial to Working Group and Expert Group deliberations. Capacity and the ability of Permanent Participants to the full and effective participation and to meaningfully engage in activities has been a challenge since the Arctic Council was created. Permanent Participants have made several initiatives to garner support from the states, governments, and Observers, but to date little progress has been made.

The positive and inclusive goals expressed in the Arctic Council Rules of Procedures must be fully adhered to. The unique structure of the Arctic Council, including Indigenous Peoples in its governance, is widely celebrated. There must be a collective effort to protect these structures and provide financial and institutional support to ensure full and effective participation and meaningful engagement of the Permanent Participants. In this spirit, efforts to ensure Permanent Participant Co-Chairs of Working Groups and at the SAO level must be implemented.

Inuit and other Indigenous Peoples bring experience in other international fora which allow “cross-pollination” and benefits the work of the Arctic Council. For examples, ICC is able to bring experience through its observer status at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the International Maritime Organization to the Arctic Council’s work. Our engagement in the implementation of the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement¹¹ is focused on co-production of knowledge and experience there can also be brought into the Arctic Council.

Naturally, such an evolution of the Arctic Council requires financial support, and new ways must be found to ensure that the resources are available at all levels. Support must also come from Observer countries and organizations, in keeping with the commitment they make when their roles are approved.

Action items:

- Establish consensus on future Permanent Participant Arctic Council Co-Chairships.

¹⁰ <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/03b0a54b-7e41-45a8-ad04-0a6f1a59892c/content>

¹¹ Formally known as the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean (CAOFA)

- Implement consistent Permanent Participant Co-Chairs in Working Groups and Expert Groups.
- Secure funding for Inuit-led research initiatives in the Arctic Council and ensure Permanent Participants have the support and capacity to initiate and lead Working Groups and research projects.
- Work toward renewed partnerships with other Permanent Participants to develop a collective approach to the work and governance of the Arctic Council based on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the *Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement*. This includes:
 - Reinforcing the role of Permanent Participants following the pandemic, challenges during the “pause” and finding a way to move beyond written procedures. As a start, push for longer deadlines while written procedures continue in force.
 - Collectively convening an Arctic Council-wide knowledge sharing workshop based on the approach to knowledge mobilization ICC developed for the EPPR.
 - Ensuring that strengthened commitments are made on the co-production of knowledge in line with the *Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement*.
 - Addressing inconsistencies by developing a standardized project template for all Working Groups on the ethical and equitable inclusion and use of Indigenous Knowledge.

2. Continuously strengthen youth engagement in the Arctic Council

At the Senior Arctic Officials plenary meeting in Hveragerði, Iceland in 2019, SAOs and Permanent Participants expressed unanimous support for moving forward on “fostering sustainable and meaningful collaboration and engagement between youth and the Arctic Council.”¹² In 2020, the Indigenous Peoples’ Secretariat presented a background paper on youth engagement. There have been efforts at the working group level to engage youth, including at CAFF and the SDWG. Through Indigenous Peoples’ Secretariat and individually, Permanent Participants have developed their own youth initiatives. From 2018-2022, ICC facilitated an Emerging Leaders Initiative to engage Inuit youth in all of ICC’s work and to build the next generation of Inuit leaders. ICC has encouraged the engagement of youth delegates within the Arctic Council and other global fora. Mutual sustained youth engagement requires commitment.

Building on the Emerging Leaders Initiative, ICC will initiate an Inuit Youth Engagement Programme and will hold an Inuit Youth Summit in 2026. Discussions are underway with potential supporters. An opportunity exists to collaboratively coordinate activities that support Indigenous youth across the Arctic, throughout the current and incoming Arctic Council chairships.

Action items:

- Continue meaningful engagement of Arctic Indigenous youth throughout the work of the Arctic Council, including holding Arctic Council youth conferences under each chairship term to accommodate the full, effective participation and meaningful engagement of Indigenous youth.
- Support an Inuit Youth Summit to be held in 2026.

3. Create a safe and welcoming environment for Arctic Indigenous Peoples and fully recognize Indigenous Knowledge in all Arctic Council Working Groups and Expert Groups

To fully implement the intent of the Ottawa Declaration and subsequent Arctic Council declarations, creating a safe and inclusive space for Indigenous Knowledge holders is crucial. Ad hoc approaches where

¹² <https://oarchive.arctic-council.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/9a73598c-4f20-493b-a4ab-9ce5ac76d476/content>

the Arctic Council and its Working Groups are individually trying to include Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge i creates the risk of trying to fit Arctic Indigenous Peoples into predefined boxes and existing non-Indigenous systems. Instead, the Arctic Council must implement and fully support Permanent Participant co-led processes and frameworks that are open to and based on Arctic Indigenous Peoples' cultures and knowledge, with sustainable funding and sufficient human resources.

While the Arctic Council and its Working Groups have voiced support for full and effective participation and meaningful engagement of Permanent Participants in all processes, most Working Groups still rely on scientific expertise with very little to no Indigenous engagement. Thus, the good intentions to include Indigenous Peoples fully and effectively has not been put into practice leading to patchwork approaches with no real commitment on funding and/or human capacity.

Action items:

- Collaboratively develop inclusive protocols and processes with Permanent Participants for the Arctic Council, its Working Groups and Expert Groups
- Provide equitable funding for including Indigenous Knowledge alongside science to ensure the co-production of knowledge.
- Design funding mechanisms to support Permanent Participants to develop, lead, and implement projects they prioritize.

4. Replace tokenism with full and effective participation and meaningful engagement of Indigenous Peoples throughout the Arctic Council

Having one or two 'token' Indigenous experts involved in a predominantly Western scientific process is not working. In one working group, for example, after four years of commitment and participation, two Indigenous experts ended their participation because their views and knowledge were consistently ignored in the predominantly Western scientific group.

ICC has been advocating for the Arctic Council to adopt the 2022 *Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement*, building upon the 2015 Ottawa Traditional Knowledge Principles endorsed by the six Arctic Council Permanent Participants.¹³ This proposed evolution and proper implementation would deepen the commitment to meaningfully engage Indigenous Peoples as well as Indigenous Knowledge.

Action items:

- Further develop ethical and equitable mechanisms and approaches throughout the Arctic Council and its subsidiary bodies, especially in the development and early stages of project design and Implementation and apply them consistently.
- Ensure cross cutting efforts to build common understanding and methods on the full and effective participation and meaningful engagement of Arctic Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge.

5. Build a common understanding of why it is important that Permanent Participants are part of the Arctic Council

ICC finds that there is a general lack of common understanding of the issues faced by Arctic Indigenous Peoples within the Arctic Council and its working groups and expert groups. This continues to be a root problem which must be recognized and addressed in order to be tackled. Many Indigenous Peoples are

¹³ This document was revised in 2018 and retitled *Ottawa Indigenous Knowledge Principles*.

faced with the injustices that have been brought upon them by colonization where it is known to exist and are still living in structural systems that are not of their choosing and not embedded in their own culture.

This root problem extends to how work is conducted in the Arctic Council and its subsidiary bodies where many non-Indigenous colleagues have little to no knowledge about the history of Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic, their cultural background, or Indigenous Knowledge.

The turnover in government personnel at the Arctic Council table is an ongoing issue and Permanent Participants often find themselves repeatedly in the position of having to educate their new colleagues about their role in the Arctic Council and about Arctic Indigenous Peoples in general.

To address this issue and create an understanding of the issues faced by Arctic Indigenous Peoples, it would be useful to develop onboarding materials – background documents, briefing notes, etc. – to broaden the understanding of socio-environmental issues faced by Indigenous Peoples both in the past and present.

To address high turnover and inadequate knowledge of Arctic Indigenous Peoples among new state representatives at the Arctic Council, ICC proposes a package of briefing materials about Arctic Indigenous Peoples and the important role Permanent Participants have played in the development of the Council. This task could be assigned to the Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat using material on its website produced for the Arctic Council's 20th anniversary as a starting point.¹⁴

Action items:

- Develop a package of briefing materials about Arctic Indigenous Peoples and the important role the Permanent Participants play in the development and progress of the Arctic Council as well as Arctic politics at large.
- Expand, strategize, and further develop the work of the Sustainable Development Working Group to include issues within social, cultural and justice systems as deemed relevant by Arctic Indigenous Peoples.

6. Create space, capacity, and secure funding for Inuit-led research initiatives

For ICC there is no doubt that the work of the Arctic Council is strengthened by the efforts of Arctic Indigenous Peoples. However, a continuing unsolved challenge is the capacity and funding the work of Indigenous-led research and initiatives. The lack of funding results in inequitable contributions by Permanent Participants and disproportionate strategic planning in the work of the Arctic Council, which is not consistent with its purpose.

The ICC proposes a change in the way Arctic Council projects are prioritized and funded in order to ensure that Permanent Participants are supported to lead. Member states have a responsibility to address capacity gaps by providing financial support for Permanent Participants to initiate and lead projects. This will require collaborative innovation and must be based on the principles outlined in the *Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement*.

Action items:

- Build mechanisms in the Arctic Council that ensure and accommodate Permanent Participants to initiate and lead Working Groups and research projects.

¹⁴ See <https://www.arcticpeoples.com/our-work-2#story-map-project>

- Ensure the Permanent Participants have sufficient funding and capacity to initiate, develop, design and lead Arctic Council projects.
- Develop an ICC-wide fundraising strategy to support Arctic Council engagement across all ICC offices. Engage professional advice if required.

ICC calls on Arctic Council members, other states, observers and other partners to support the full and effective participation and meaningful engagement of Indigenous Peoples through their status as Permanent Participants, throughout the work of the Arctic Council. With this position paper, ICC commits to its continued participation and engagement and welcomes support to be able to implement ICC's full potential as a Permanent Participant and a co-founder of the Arctic Council.