

The Alta Declaration

We, the Ministers of the Arctic countries:

Recalling that the Ministers of the eight Arctic governments met in Rovaniemi, Finland in June 1991 to establish the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), and have met since then in Nuuk, Greenland in September 1993 and Inuvik, Canada in March 1996 to review and determine further measures to collectively implement the AEPS;

Noting the progress made by the AEPS and its programmes since its inauguration;

Recognising the importance of the Arctic to our respective countries, to present and future generations of all Arctic residents, especially indigenous peoples¹, and to the rest of the world;

Acknowledging that the Arctic environment consists of ecosystems with unique features which are particularly vulnerable to impacts resulting from human activities, and as such require special precautionary and protective measures;

Recognising that while the Arctic, in comparison with most other areas of the world, remains a clean environment with large areas of unspoiled nature, it faces serious environmental risks and problems from contaminants transported from sources outside the Arctic which require effective international action. Also, in some parts of the Arctic, severe pollution from local sources requires both national and international remedial action;

Recognising that sustainable development is an overriding objective for all activities in order to secure ecological safety and the integration of environmental concerns in management, planning and development;

Acknowledging the importance of sustainable development in the Arctic to the health, social and cultural well-being, and economic circumstances of Arctic peoples;

Recognising the importance of biological diversity in the Arctic region and **reaffirming** the special role and responsibilities of the Arctic countries with respect to protection, restoration and conservation of the Arctic environment;

Reaffirming the support of our countries for the principles of the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 of the UN Conference on Environment and Development, and regional and global conventions and other arrangements or instruments relevant to the Arctic;

Acknowledging with appreciation the substantive and comprehensive work of the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) in preparing "The AMAP Assessment Report: Arctic Pollution Issues" and "Arctic Pollution Issues: A State of the Arctic Environment Report" and in holding the international scientific symposium in Tromsø Norway;

Acknowledging with gratitude the work and reports of the programmes on Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME), Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR) and Sustainable Development and Utilisation (SDU);

Recognising the special role and important contributions of indigenous peoples in each of the AEPS programmes;

Recognising also the support and the contributions from non-Arctic countries, global and regional inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations in the AEPS and **encouraging** their continued participation and contributions to activities and objectives of the AEPS programmes;

Welcoming the establishment of the Arctic Council in September 1996 and **looking forward to** the work of the Arctic Council to promote co-operation, co-ordination and interaction among Arctic countries and to build on the achievements and objectives of the AEPS;

Here by make the following Declaration:

1. **We reaffirm** our commitment to protect the Arctic environment as one of the priority elements of sustainable development, as elaborated under the AEPS, and **agree** to continue joint efforts to implement, develop and improve AEPS programmes under the auspices of the Arctic Council;
2. **We welcome** with appreciation the AMAP reports and commit to take their findings and recommendations into consideration in our policies and programmes. **We agree** to increase our efforts to limit and reduce emissions of contaminants into the environment and to promote international co-operation in order to address the serious pollution risks reported by AMAP. **We will** draw the attention of the global community to the content of the AMAP reports in all relevant international fora, particularly at the forthcoming Special Session of the General Assembly, and **we will** make a determined effort to secure support for international action which will reduce Arctic contamination;
3. **We receive** with appreciation the "Guidelines for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in the Arctic" and the "Arctic Offshore Oil and Gas Guidelines" developed under the AEPS, and **agree** that these Guidelines be applied;
4. **We receive** with appreciation the "Arctic Guide for Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response" and **encourage** the Arctic countries to make use of the Guide as appropriate;
5. **We note** the discussion on ethical principles for research in the Arctic and **underline** the principle that Arctic research is based upon commonly accepted scientific guidelines. **We also note** the "Reference Document on Ethical Principles" and **recommend** that this be used as appropriate;
6. **We encourage** continued input and participation of the Permanent Participants in the AEPS programmes, including indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge, as essential to sustainable development, including the use of natural resources and effective environmental protection of the Arctic;
7. **We encourage** international scientific research as necessary to expand the knowledge and understanding of the Arctic region;
8. **We support** the efforts of the Russian Federation in addressing its environmental problems, and in particular its recent efforts towards developing a Russian Programme of Action for protecting the marine environment from land-based sources of pollution, and its efforts to protect the environment from the effects of accidents.
9. **We welcome** with appreciation the report from the Senior Arctic Affairs Officials (SAAOs) to the Fourth Ministerial Conference on the AEPS, adopt the SAAOs recommendations, and instruct the senior officials to assign and direct future work of the programmes based on the following priorities:
 - **We endorse** continuation of activities for monitoring, data collection, exchange of data on the impacts, and assessment of the effects of

contaminants and their pathways, increased Ultraviolet-B (UV-B) radiation due to stratospheric ozone depletion, and climate change on Arctic ecosystems. Special emphasis is required on human health impacts and the effects of multiple stressors, as detailed in the SAAO report on the future work of AMAP and its implementation. The overall objective is to provide reliable and sufficient information on the status of, and threats to, the Arctic environment, and to provide scientific advice on actions to be taken.

- **We endorse** continuation of activities for conservation, monitoring and assessment of threats to Arctic flora, fauna and their habitats. We **welcome** the co-operative Strategy for the Conservation of Biological Diversity in the Arctic Region, and note the intention to develop a long-term plan to give effect to the Strategy. **We also endorse the** further development and implementation of the "Circumpolar Protected Areas Network (CPAN) Strategy and Action Plan", the implementation of the "International Murre Conservation Strategy and Action Plan", and the "Circumpolar Eider Conservation Strategy and Action Plan".
 - **We endorse** continuation of activities to identify means of preventing or reducing pollution of the Arctic environment through co-ordinated action programmes and guidelines complementing existing legal arrangements. Focus should be on the completion and implementation of the "Regional Programme of Action for the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment from Land-based Activities", follow-up on the application of "Arctic Offshore Oil and Gas Guidelines", and development of a co-ordinated system for data collection and sharing of information on current and potential shipping activities to facilitate analysis of their associated environmental effects.
 - **We endorse** continuation of activities to identify means of improving emergency prevention, preparedness and response, in particular the development of an action plan for source control to meet risks identified, the development of a "Field Guide for Arctic Oil Spill Response" and a strategic plan of action for this programme area.
 - **We endorse** the continued analysis and maintenance of a comprehensive overview regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of international agreements, measures and guidelines, and the analysis of accident notification systems to identify gaps and improve existing arrangements.
 - **We recognize** the importance of waste management issues, and **instruct** the senior officials to continue work in this area.
 - **We look forward** to progress reports at future Arctic Council meetings on the priority activities defined above.
10. **We extend** the mandates for the existing Working Groups and their Secretariats on an interim basis until the first meeting of the Arctic Council decides how it will organize its work, taking into account the need to integrate, consolidate and co-ordinate the work in the most efficient and effective way;
11. **We take note** of the report on Financing Strategy and Mechanisms, and **recommend** that the next Arctic Council meeting take into consideration the

- range of options contained in the SAAO Report when exploring funding mechanisms for the Arctic Council, including participation of indigenous peoples, in particular the Russian indigenous inhabitants;
12. **We recommend** that sustainable development, including environmental protection strategies, scientific advice and traditional knowledge, be an overriding objective for all activities under the Arctic Council. **We also stress** the need for relevant activities supporting sustainable use of renewable resources by Arctic residents, in particular indigenous peoples;
 13. **We call for** the completion, as a matter of urgency, of the Terms of Reference for sustainable development programmes and Rules of Procedure necessary for the operation of the Arctic Council, and **direct** the senior officials to continue to identify and promote development of co-operative activities in other programme areas;
 14. **We recommend** that the Arctic Council co-operate and take appropriate action with other relevant fora which are pursuing complementary objectives, such as the Barents Council, in order to ensure co-ordination of work and increase efficiency;
 15. **We agree** that the Arctic countries should take joint action to promote the early completion of the on-going work on an "International Code of Safety for Ships Operating in Polar Waters" (Polar Code) under the auspices of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO);
 16. **We are committed** to deal with the threat of radioactive pollution of the Arctic to avoid irreparable damage. **We therefore fully support** regional cooperation between two or more Arctic States, as well as multilateral efforts, to enhance nuclear reactor safety and to increase and promote the safe management, storage and disposal of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste. **We call for** full implementation of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Convention on Nuclear Safety; the rapid finalisation of the IAEA Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management, and the application of the current IMO Irradiated Nuclear Fuel Code. In addition, we recognize the importance of the on-going co-operation to provide for the early completion of the facilities needed for the implementation of the ban on dumping of radioactive waste at sea adopted by the London Convention of 1972;
 17. **We agree** to work vigorously for the early completion and implementation of a protocol on the elimination or reduction of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) under the framework of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution. **We also fully support** the negotiations to conclude similar protocols on heavy metals and nitrogen oxides. **We strongly welcome** the establishment of an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee under the auspices of United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) to initiate work on a global instrument on POPs by early 1998;
 18. **We therefore proclaim** our intention to continue co-operation, co-ordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of the indigenous peoples and other Arctic residents, on common Arctic issues for the benefit of present and future generations.

In witness hereof, we sign this Declaration.

For the Government of Canada

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Mary Simon
Ambassador

**For the Government of
Denmark/Greenland**

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Marianne Jensen
Minister of Health, Environment and
Scientific Research

For the Government of Finland

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Markku Nurmi
Director General

For the Government of Iceland

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Gudmundur Bjarnason
Minister of Environment

For the Government of Norway

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Thorbjørn Berntsen
Minister of Environment

**For the Government of the Russian
Federation**

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Alexander A. Solovyanov
Deputy Chairman of the State Committee
for Environmental Protection

For the Government of Sweden

.....
Bo Kjellén
Ambassador

**For the Government of the United
States of America**

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R. Tucker Scully
Director

Alta, June 13, 1997

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1. The use of the term "peoples" in this Declaration shall not be construed as having any implications as regard the rights which may attach to the term under international law.