

External Affairs and International Trade Canada
Western Europe Relations Division

ARCTIC COUNCIL

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, during the course of a state visit to the USSR in November 1989, suggested in Leningrad that the idea of an Arctic Council should be explored.

The Prime Minister's statement in 1989 led to the establishment of a panel on the idea of an international Arctic Council co-chaired by University of Toronto Professor Franklyn Griffiths and Ms. Rosemary Kuptana of Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, that has advanced its own framework report for an Arctic Council.

On November 28, 1990, the then Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Rt. Hon. Joe Clark, announced that Canada was proposing that the eight Arctic countries (Canada, USSR, USA, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland) establish an Arctic Council to discuss issues of common interest and promote circumpolar cooperation. In his announcement, Mr. Clark especially emphasized that this Council must allow for the participation of northern peoples.

In recent years there has been a significant growth in cooperation among the Arctic countries and particularly among regional governments, indigenous peoples and other interest initiatives have been developed to foster this cooperation. In 1978, the Inuit of northern Canada, Greenland and Alaska established the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC). The Inuit of northern Russia subsequently joined this organization. The International Arctic Science Committee was struck at Resolute, NWT, in August 1990. In June 1991, representatives of the ICC, the Nordic Sami Council, and the Aboriginal Peoples of the Russian North held the first Arctic Indigenous Leader's Summit in Copenhagen. In November 1991, leaders of fourteen northern regional governments established the Northern Forum in Anchorage.

The governments of the eight Arctic countries signed the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy in Rovaniemi, Finland in June 1991. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Tom Siddon, used the occasion in Rovaniemi to invite the other countries to expand this international partnership: "I believe we should pursue the formation of an Arctic Council in the same spirit with which we developed the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy".