

These objectives will be pursued through a number of initiatives and venues. In particular, Canada's northern foreign policy will focus on four priority areas: support for the work of the Arctic Council; participation in the expanding international support for northern Russia; realizing the full potential of the University of the Arctic, and enhancing a Canadian and circumpolar policy research network; and promoting sustainable development through the pursuit of economic and trade opportunities across the circumpolar region.

Strengthening the Arctic Council

The Arctic Council was founded in 1996 as an umbrella organization to give political impetus and strategic direction to the circumpolar community. As founding chair, Canada sees the Council as the main focus of our emerging northern foreign policy. To maintain our influence in the region, we will deepen our commitment to circumpolar partnerships, beginning through the Arctic Council.

A unique feature of the Arctic Council — one that gives it critical legitimacy and relevance — is the direct participation of northerners, particularly Indigenous northern peoples. Building on Indigenous involvement in its forerunner institution, the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy, the Council has broken new ground internationally. For the first time — anywhere — Indigenous peoples, as Permanent Participants, have an integral role to play in the work of the Arctic Council. When the Council meets, it does so with the full and active participation of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the Saami Council, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, and the Aleut International Association. Their involvement ensures that those with the most at stake have a clear voice in shared forums to resolve common transboundary concerns and to develop common approaches.

At the next Arctic Council ministerial meeting in Alaska in October 2000, an additional permanent participant may be approved, which will further broaden and deepen the involvement of northern Indigenous peoples in the work of the Council. However, all Permanent Participants lack sufficient internal resources to participate effectively. They continue to require assistance from Arctic Council member states to ensure effective participation.

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