

As far as multilateral co-operation is concerned, our government wants to move quickly to establish a more formal means of managing the circumpolar agenda. This government intends to push forward the creation of an Arctic Council by the end of this year, in which all eight circumpolar states and their Aboriginal peoples will be represented.

The Arctic Council is the best forum in which to address issues of common concern to Arctic communities. In my meetings with United States Secretary of State Christopher earlier this year, I specifically asked him to support the creation of the Council. I am pleased to report that the Secretary of State responded positively to my request. We are now in the process of discussing the next steps with the United States and our other Arctic neighbours. I know that many of you here have been working actively on this issue. I look forward to very close co-operation with you as we move ahead.

The threats to Arctic security are global in scope. Solutions to these threats can only be achieved in a multilateral context. Therefore, Canada is working without respite toward the creation of an Arctic Council uniting all eight circumpolar states.

These examples of positive initiatives must be followed through. What is needed in Canada is a means by which we can pursue these initiatives in a co-ordinated fashion. As it is now, different federal departments share the responsibility for implementing Canada's Arctic policies. This government believes we must have greater co-ordination. It is therefore with great pleasure that I am announcing today the Government's intention to create the position of Arctic Circumpolar Ambassador within my department. In making this announcement, we are joining our Nordic neighbours in creating a special ambassadorial position for circumpolar Arctic issues. The Arctic Ambassador will be responsible for co-ordinating Canada's contribution to circumpolar affairs.

The appointment of an Ambassador will be the fulfilment of one of our foreign policy platform commitments. After consultation with my colleague the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, I will be making a further announcement on this position.

Let me conclude by congratulating the organizers of the conference for their effort in bringing together a group of such distinguishing Arctic experts. I want to assure you that I value your input very much.

Your deliberations yesterday and today have, I am certain, resulted in many good ideas, which my officials have no doubt noted. I look forward to hearing your advice as to how we can move forward to implement our circumpolar Arctic strategy. Indeed, the results of this conference will provide a useful first set of guidelines for the new Ambassador!