

Canadian government is committed to maintaining our sovereignty in the Arctic. Of course, Canada has no intention of closing its Arctic waters, including the Northwest Passage, to other countries. However, we insist that any voyage be made with Canadian consent and be subject to Canadian law, particularly the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act.

A New Approach

Let me touch on a couple of means by which the Canadian government believes it can advance the various interests I described.

As I said earlier, the Arctic's unique environment must be protected. Canada is a strong supporter of the Arctic Environment Protection Strategy (AEPS), adopted in 1991 by the eight Arctic nations. This Strategy illustrates both a successful experiment in multilateral co-operation and our commitment to integrating Aboriginal peoples in the decision-making process. Three indigenous organizations, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), the Sami Council and the Association of Russian Aboriginal Peoples, were given permanent observer status.

Indigenous peoples in the Arctic not only have a vested interest in protecting the environment they inhabit, but also have an invaluable expertise that we can, and indeed, must, learn from. There is work currently under way by Canada and the ICC on how to integrate indigenous knowledge into the AEPS. Achievements on the multilateral level have been complemented by similar successes at the bilateral level.

These successes include the 1992 Canada-Russia Agreement on Arctic Co-operation and some of the initiatives launched under the AEPS. I want to take steps to further develop our co-operation on the basis of this framework agreement, and I am very much looking forward to working together with my colleague Ron Irwin in this regard.

We have to go beyond the existing mechanisms. We must develop both our bilateral and our multilateral relations. In short, Canada will continue to seek out the best possible avenues of co-operation between the various circumpolar nations.

For example, there has been much discussion between Canada and the United States about ways to preserve a wilderness area that straddles the Northwest Territories, the Yukon and Alaska. As you know, the Great Porcupine caribou herd inhabits this area. I believe we must move quickly with the Americans to formalize arrangements for preserving this herd and the surrounding wilderness.