

The five main Working Groups of the Arctic Council collectively carry an agenda that focusses on the sustainable development and environmental protection of the Arctic region. Together, they represent an effort to address the most critical issues facing the circumpolar North, where multilateral co-operation is vital. These include the Sustainable Development Working Group, the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment, the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program, the Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Group, and the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna. There is interest in expanding the work of these groups, and in creating others as well. However, chronic under-funding hampers existing programs and prevents effective expansion.

The secretariat for the Arctic Council is another issue that must be addressed, not only because of the need to more effectively support the efforts of the Working Groups, but also to ensure its viability and effectiveness. The Arctic Council must be effective in linking with other regional forums, bilateral programs and broader multilateral discussions. Such linkages are crucial in order to avoid duplication and maximize awareness and effectiveness. This need has been recognized by all Arctic Council members, as well as by the other Arctic regional forums previously mentioned. An ongoing commitment to the work of the secretariat is required if it is to be effective. A strong secretariat can build on work that has already been done to catalogue various activities and programs in the circumpolar region.

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Through the Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy, Canada intends to focus policy efforts and increased resources on strengthening existing activities of the Arctic Council and promoting a continued and increased role for Permanent Participants. Indeed, Canadian support for emerging northern civil society could prove invaluable in influencing the decision-making process on Arctic issues in major world capitals. It will facilitate the development of northern people-to-people contacts, and will support increased North-South linkages. It will continue to encourage Indigenous community activities, while promoting the participation and leadership of Aboriginal community leaders.

Canada will promote more effective linkages between the Arctic Council and other forums in which Arctic issues are addressed. Where possible, expanding the Council's work will also be a focus, perhaps starting with the link between emerging economic and environmental issues (e.g. impact of climate change on the Northwest Passage as a commercial route) and also a link to research and education. These last objectives relate, in part, to an identified need for capacity building within Arctic communities; and a search for means to ensure sustainable economic growth in the circumpolar world as traditional economies wane, while maintaining a focus on environmental protection.