

Canadian officials who are involved in these discussions have been struck by the equally positive approach demonstrated by their Soviet counterparts. I am told that our two countries are enjoying close, easy working relations and that we share a common course more often than we disagree. It is almost as if we "see" the same Arctic, by which I mean we share a perception of that balance between rights and responsibilities that being an Arctic country entails. Furthermore, both countries are promoting enhanced international cooperation in the Arctic in order to address some very real, down to earth problems rather than because of an attraction to abstract geopolitical ideals. It is this pragmatic "people-to-people" quality of our cooperation that is giving such a solid foundation to our efforts, and so may benefits to our peoples.

Where does this newly-flourishing spirit come from? I believe Canadians and Soviets have a uniquely common perception of the Arctic and its place within our respective national fabrics. For us, the Arctic is not just a remote region of primarily scientific interest, like Antarctica, although Arctic science is extremely important. Likewise, the Arctic is not just a source of resources, although Arctic resources are an important source of national wealth. In fact, for Canada and the Soviet Union, the Arctic is not just any one thing at all. For both of us, the Arctic is a fully-fledged national region with all the human, economic, ecological, cultural and strategic complexities of any other, and a fair number of distinctive ones to boot. Our Arctics are not only geographically huge, they have a depth and importance that our peoples celebrate and our governments find challenging. No better proof of this can be found than the agenda of this conference. I can think of no two other countries that would give national importance to such a broad range of Arctic issues.

We in Canada have come to see the Arctic more and more in human terms, which is why we place such an emphasis on the participation of Northern Territorial governments and Northern indigenous peoples in Circumpolar cooperation. Perhaps this is partly because it was the Inuit themselves who inspired us when they initiated what might be called the modern era of Circumpolar cooperation roughly a decade ago. It was they who taught many Southern Canadians that the Arctic is rich and varied, and that Canadian pride in the Arctic carries with it the responsibility to respect the Arctic ecology and to deliver justice to the Arctic peoples. The efforts of the Canadian Inuit and other Northern Canadians to develop bonds in other Arctic regions, and to defend their traditional ways of life when challenged within the international community, have the firm support of the Canadian government.