

# The Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy

## Introduction - Renewing Our Commitment

At home and abroad, the North has taken on new importance in Canadian foreign policy.

For the North, this is a time of rapid change. Canada's own northern territories, for example, are emerging from an historical tradition of being on the periphery of Canadian political life as a result of political reform, reconciliation and decentralization, and are developing new governance structures. Similarly, a circumpolar community with a wide range of (often divergent) interests is also coming into being as a coherent entity. The end of the Cold War lifted the constraints which that period imposed on co-operation among the eight Arctic countries and on interaction among the North's Indigenous peoples. Circumpolar relations, contacts and activities have now begun to flourish. This has also occurred as a consequence of growing global awareness of the vital ecological role played by the North, and as northerners from across the circumpolar region have begun to press for action to address the serious environmental, economic, social and cultural threats facing their communities.

Globalization exposes all regions to new political, economic, social and environmental forces, which often diminish regional control over events — even in the most industrialized countries. These forces include the revolution in information technology (for instance, the emergence of electronic commerce), the transboundary movement of persistent organic pollutants, climate change, and the spread of infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis or AIDS. The transboundary nature of these forces makes international co-operation imperative.

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*The North comprises the Canadian territories of the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, plus Nunavik (northern Quebec) and all of Labrador; the U.S. state of Alaska (except the area known as the Southeast); all of Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland); Iceland; the northern regions of Norway, Sweden and Finland; all of what Russia terms the Arctic and the Russian North; and the marine systems of the Arctic Ocean and its adjacent seas, including the Beaufort, Labrador, Bering, Chukchi, Greenland, Norwegian, Barents, Kara, Laptev and East Siberian seas. It also includes what the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples identified as "Mid-North"—that is, large areas of the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec that reflect northern conditions.*

*Canada needs to bring a comprehensive northern dimension to its foreign policy. To be effective, the new policy must be an integral part of Canada's broader foreign policy, and must also be reinforced by domestic policies.*