

Canada-Russia Arctic and Northern Cooperation

Nearly 25 years of dialogue between Canada and Russia led to a series of bilateral arrangements on Arctic and northern issues starting in 1984.

The mutual interests of Canada and Russia in the North have resulted in exchanges of politicians, bureaucrats, professionals, business people and local inhabitants, including aboriginal people. The exchanges have provided unprecedented access to remote regions, firsthand knowledge of Russian northern technology, and the potential for commercial activities.

This bilateral cooperation takes on a new meaning since Russians are experiencing developments similar to those occurring in Canada's North — in areas such as constitutional issues, self-government, environmental protection, resource development and housing.

Current cooperation covers such diverse fields as geology and Arctic petroleum, construction, environment, socio-economic development of aboriginal people, education, arts and crafts, health and administration of justice. The results include

- joint publication of a series of circumpolar geological maps
- successful promotion of Canadian expertise in northern construction through touring exhibits and exchange of designs. As a result, in March 1992, the Government of Yakutia in Eastern Siberia awarded a US\$26 million contract to a Yellowknife firm of engineers and architects to build a town near Yakutsk

- exchange of information and work on the transport and effects of contaminants in the Arctic
- Canadian field work in the remote Arctic regions of Russia to gather information on the problems of aboriginal people.

Arctic Council

In recent years, circumpolar countries have expressed a desire to work more closely to protect the Arctic, its environment and its peoples. As a first step, the governments of the Arctic countries adopted a declaration and a strategy on Arctic environmental protection in June 1991. Canada is now pressing for an international Arctic Council, an umbrella-type intergovernmental forum, to discuss issues of common interest and to promote circumpolar cooperation.

In May 1992, at the invitation of the Canadian government, officials from the seven other circumpolar countries, including Russia, as well as representatives of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, met in Ottawa with Canadian officials for two days of talks on the creation of an Arctic Council. The next round of consultations is expected to take place in September 1992 in Ottawa.