

Meeting between the Swedish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council and
Observers/Ad-hoc Observers
Stockholm, Sweden
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Statement
by
Parliamentary Senior Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan
Mr. Shuji Kira

Ambassador Gustaf Lind, Chair for the Senior Arctic Officials of the Arctic Council,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to extend my appreciation to the Government of Sweden as the Chair for the Arctic Council for organizing this meeting and inviting Japan. This meeting brought together high level delegates of observers and ad-hoc observers to the Arctic Council and provides us an opportunity to be briefed by the Swedish Chairmanship on the current issues over the Arctic Council agenda, to be followed by the exchange of views among participants. This is the first attempt of its kind for the Arctic Council and I believe this event is extremely meaningful. For myself, I am honored to be the first Parliamentary Senior Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan to attend a meeting of the Arctic Council.

The challenges surrounding the Arctic are now becoming global issues. From this perspective, this meeting inviting participants from non-Arctic regions is of critical importance. Japan believes that the outcome of today's discussion would constitute good input from observers and ad-hoc observers towards the 8th Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council next year.

<Evaluation on Concrete Efforts by the Arctic Council>

Mr. Chairperson,

Japan, as a maritime State, has been paying great attention to the Arctic. It thus highly commends that eight Arctic States, in cooperation with Permanent Participants, have been addressing common challenges in the region, such as environmental protection and sustainable development.

The situation surrounding the Arctic has been dramatically changing due to climate change in recent years. Having listened to the introductory presentations, we have further deepened our understanding of new challenges facing the Arctic Council. As mentioned in the presentation, in response to changes in the Arctic Ocean, the Nuuk Declaration, adopted at the 7th Ministerial Meeting in 2011, identified measures to strengthen the Arctic Council.

I understand that, as part of such measures, a task force to strengthen the Council was launched. The preparatory process to establish a standing secretariat in Tromso, Norway, to be operational by the next Ministerial Meeting is now underway, which Japan highly appreciates.

Japan also commends that the negotiation among the Member States have been smoothly conducted in order that an agreement on cooperation on marine oil pollution preparedness and response in the Arctic would be open for the Ministers to sign at the next Ministerial Meeting. The development of this instrument shows another example of the Arctic Council to take concrete action, following the adoption of the Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic, done at last year's Ministerial Meeting as a first legally binding agreement.

<Japan's Application to Observer Status>

Mr. Chairperson,

One of the achievements made at the last Ministerial Meeting, which drew Japan's great attention, was the adoption of the recommendations of the Senior Arctic Officials on the role of the observers and criteria for admitting new observers to the Council. By doing so, it made clearer what the Council expects from the observers.

As mentioned in the introductory presentation, decision for admitting new observers will be taken at the next Ministerial Meeting in Kiruna, taking into account the extent to which each applicant fulfils the criteria. This was also confirmed in the recommendation adopted at the Deputy Ministers' Meeting held here in May this year, as I understand.

As for Japan, since we applied for the status of observer in July, 2009, we have taken part in various meetings of the Council as an ad-hoc observer, including the last year's Ministerial Meeting. Through our frequent participation in those meetings, Japan has deepened its understanding on the activities of the Council. When we attended working groups, in particular, we took every opportunity to present the achievements of our observation and research in the Arctic and demonstrated our will and ability to participate in concrete activities of the Council, which were highly appreciated by the participants. The latest example was the presentation given by a Japanese scientist on Japan's activities in the Arctic region, at the working group of the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP) held here in Stockholm in October this year. Such engagement by Japan in the activities of the Arctic Council clearly shows that Japan's acceptance of the objectives of the Council set out in the Ottawa Declaration and its full support to them.

The observation and research activities by Japan in the Arctic date back to as early as the 1950s. Japan also has been conducting joint studies with Members of the Council. For example, we have engaged in observation at the Arctic Environment Research Center in Ny-Alesund, Svalbard since 1991; we set up the observation radar in Longyearbyen in Svalbard, with the European Incoherent Scatter Scientific Association (EISCAT).

As regards the respect for values, interests, culture, and tradition of Arctic indigenous peoples, Japan is determined and eligible to address this matter in an appropriate way, based upon our own experiences with indigenous people living in Japan. As a State who has always valued the "rule of law", let us reiterate our support to the view expressed in the Ilulissat Declaration that an extensive international legal framework, including the law of the sea, applies to the Arctic Ocean. In committing to this legal framework, it is needless to say that Japan recognizes and respects sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction of the Members of the Arctic Council.

With regard to the participation in the Arctic Council, Japan had attended as an observer at the Ottawa Conference in 1996, which was clearly shown in the joint communiqué of the Conference. At the Conference, needless to say, the Arctic Council was founded as a high-level forum for cooperation in the Arctic, which was an outgrowth of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS). This fact tells that Japan has followed the activities of the Council since its inception.

<Future Contribution of Japan to the Council as an Observer>

Mr. Chairperson,

I would like to reiterate that, once granted the observer status, Japan will be ready to further contribute to the Arctic Council by sharing its expertise built upon its years of research and observation of the Arctic, enjoying more stable status than ad-hoc one.

In concrete, we are considering participating in working groups, for instance, the AMAP working group. We would like to consult with the relevant Working Group Chairs and others on the modalities of our participation.

Mr. Chairperson,

I wish to express that today's exchange of views between the Chairmanship of the Council and the observers/ad-hoc observers will pave a meaningful step leading to the success at the Council's 8th Ministerial Meeting next year.

Let me conclude my remarks by commending Swedish Chairmanship since May last year, and offering my best wishes for its further leadership during the remaining term.

Thank you very much.

(End)