

# The Arctic Council



*Protecting the Natural Ecosystem of the Arctic  
Region and its Indigenous People*

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## 1. Personal Introduction:

Dear Delegates,

My name is Rasmus Conrad, I am 20 years old and currently studying Civil Engineering and Business Administration at the TU Braunschweig, after having graduated from the Herbartgymnasium Oldenburg in 2019. I do a lot of sports like fitness, basketball and badminton, play the clarinet and tenor saxophone, enjoy reading books and listening to Hardstyle and Psytrance (although not at the same time). It is my honor to chair the Arctic Council at OLMUN 2022 together with Younes. This year's conference will be my 15th MUN, my sixth OLMUN and my eighth conference as chair. I am really looking forward to my (probably) last OLMUN and a lot of fun in our committee and the evening events with you.

See you soon in Oldenburg!

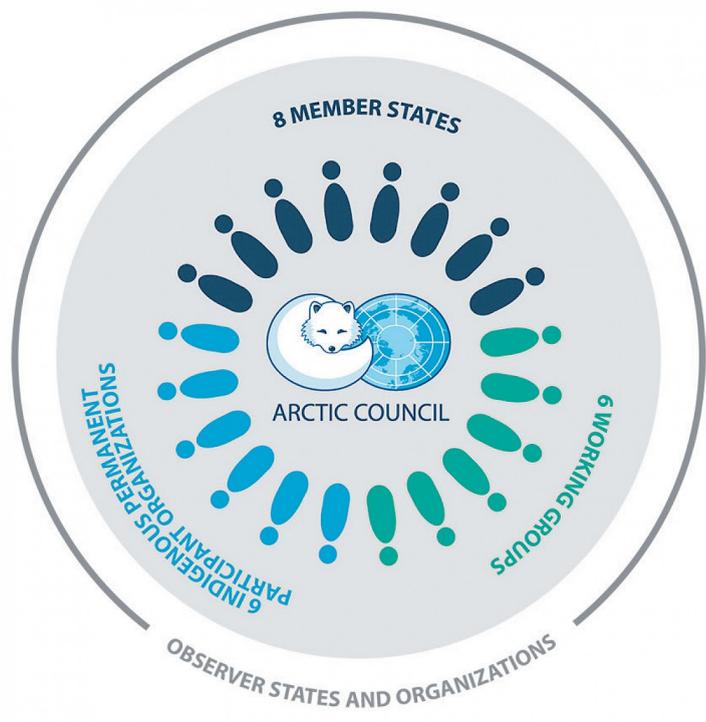
Dear Delegates,

My name is Younes El Guernaoui. I am 19 years old and I am in my last year of school at the Cäcilienschule here in Oldenburg. I like parkour and football and I am very interested in history and geography. I constantly find new books on various historical topics I want to read, which inevitably leads to me not finishing any book, as I always get distracted by the new ones I come across. I am looking forward to chairing the Arctic Council at this year's OLMUN conference together with Rasmus. I have chaired once before at OLMUN, as well as having participated once as a delegate. I am looking forward to meeting you all in person this summer. It will be a great experience.

See you soon at OLMUN!

## 2. The Arctic Council

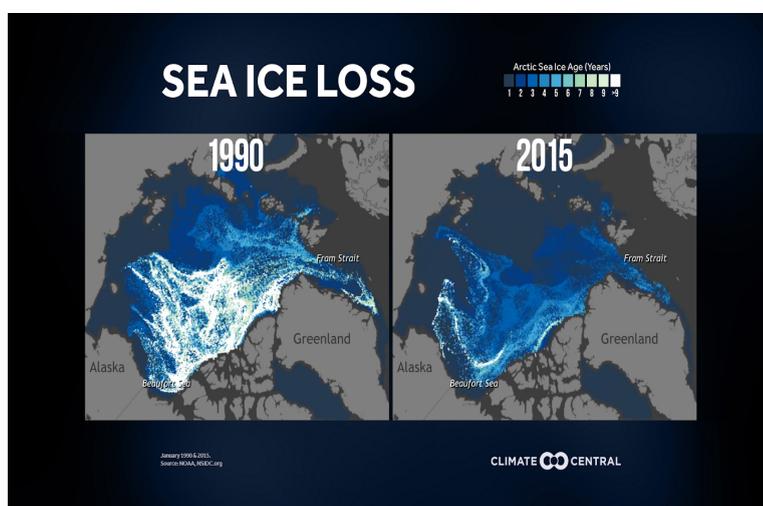
As a consequence of an increasing strive for an improvement and an increasing cooperation within the Arctic Region, the Arctic Council (AC) has been



established. This took place in 1996 in the context of the Ottawa Declaration, according to which there are eight permanent member countries: Canada, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, the United States of America and the Russian Federation. The AC is unique in its structure, due to the fact that it also includes indigenous people. There are six organizations representing the indigenous people of the Arctic in the AC:

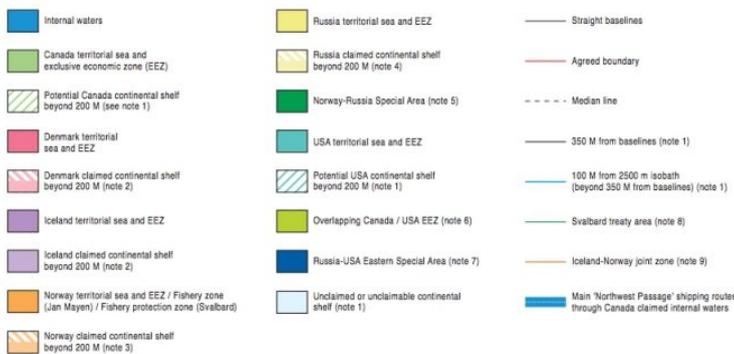
- the Aleut International Association,
- the Arctic Athabaskan Council,
- the Gwich'in Council International,
- the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC),
- the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON),
- and the Saami Council.

Correspondingly, they are permanent members. Moreover, decisions are taken by consensus, thus demanding unity and willingness for compromise. In addition to that, it is essential to bear the indigenous people and the environment in mind when discussing a matter. As the AC focuses on a region rather than a particular matter such as drug policy, the Committee includes a prodigious amount of topics. However, the main issues which the AC combats are shaped by climate change. The Arctic is particularly vulnerable to increasing temperatures of the sea. Therefore, it is essential to minimize the overall damage. Changes to the ecology ultimately affect other aspects of everyday life in the Arctic such as the culture and the economy.



Climate change shifts the focus to the Arctic Region. As ice caps are starting to melt and the sea becomes passable for ships during the summer months, it increases the attractiveness of this part of the world. Natural resources are becoming

more accessible, leading to a competition between governments which are members of the AC or Observer States (i.e. China, India, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom). Ultimately, this leads to a redefinition of the borders within the Arctic. A country extends their borders beyond 200 nautical miles



if they can provide a committee of experts, the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), with sufficient evidence in relation to their continental shelf. The continental shelf basically describes a piece of a continent which is covered by a body of water. The claim is exceptionally profitable for governments, as it would secure new rights for natural resources lying within their new borders. Due to the fact that oil extraction has not been executed on a scale of countries such as Saudi Arabia, there are huge oil reserves hiding beneath the ocean floor. The US geological survey

estimates that approximately 30% of the world's undiscovered gas and 13% of the world's undiscovered oil lies within this part of the earth. However, the extraction of these natural resources directly interferes with Arctic wildlife and the global climate. In order to detect oil, companies use seismic blasting as a method. Seismic blasting describes the usage of air blasts, which create 250 decibels. This is especially cruel towards marine wildlife, as it could potentially lead to hearing loss and affects their behavior overall, which could be lethal. Another big issue is oil spills. Catastrophes

such as the Deepwater Horizon Blowout in 2011, demonstrate potential dangers of Off-Shore oil extraction, which might turn out even worse in a remote region as the Arctic is. Overall, it is essential for the AC to face these problems in order to obtain sustainability for future generations to come.

Overall, the AC includes a lot more topics, which are being handled by six different working groups, all being specialized in a particular issue:

- the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP),
- the Conservation of Arctic Flora & Fauna (CAFF),
- the Emergency Prevention, Preparedness & Response (EPPR),
- the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME),
- the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG),
- and the Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP).



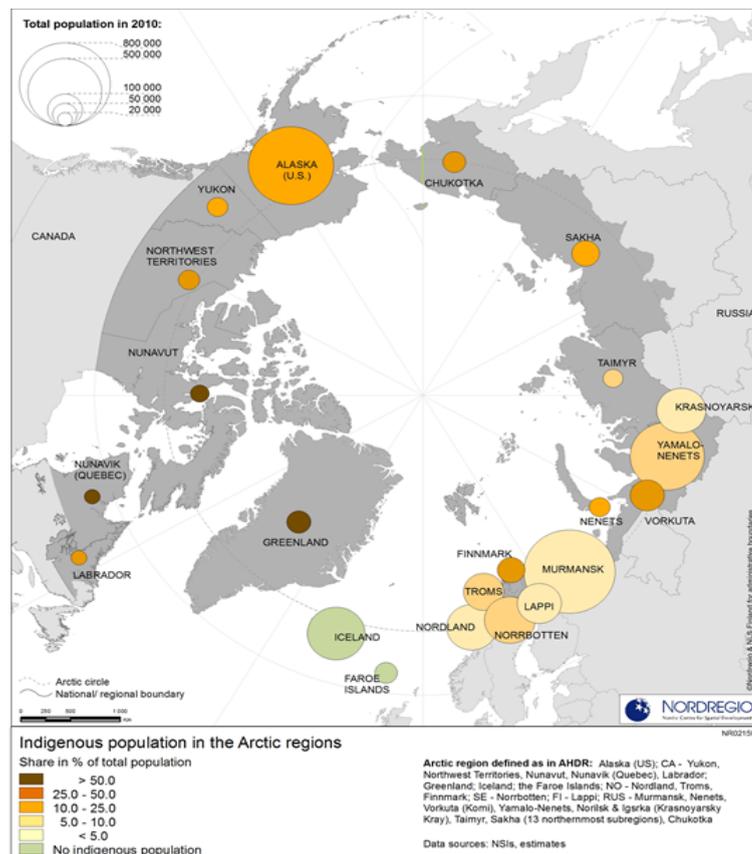
The AC provides these working groups with projects and assessments which they have to execute and regularly report to the council.

### 3. Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic

Approximately 10% of the 13.1 million people living in the area of the circumpolar North are indigenous people, whilst, as the map illustrates,

their share of the total population differs significantly in the different Arctic regions. Correspondingly, there are huge differences in their political and economic influence, which generally still can be considered relatively low. Although their cultures, traditions and languages are all very unique, they all have a very special connection to their land and nature. Also the rapid change of their lifestyles because of Industrialization and Globalization is something they have in common, which is already really challenging in regard to keeping distinct languages, traditions and livelihoods such as reindeer herding, fishing and hunting.

Climate change poses now and in the future an even bigger threat to their traditional lifestyles, as it significantly impacts indigenous harvesting methods. For instance, a lot of their hunting preys (i.e. polar bears, seals, whales and some fish stocks) are extremely dependent on ice cover, which is why disappearing sea ice and occurrences of thin ice makes hunting more difficult and dangerous. In addition to that, ice coverage plays an important role in sea temperature regulation and primary productivity, thus its decline causes more rapid weather changes and severe weather conditions like strong winds and storms, further endangering hunters. Moreover, housing, infrastructure and transport connections of coastal indigenous communities are seriously affected by climate change, with rising maintenance costs and in some



cases even the necessity of relocation. Increasing mining and drilling activities, but also shipping traffic due to the decreasing ice coverage, poses another threat in form of pollution caused by risky drilling and mining sites (icebergs and melting perma-frost). How to help the Arctic's indigenous population to cope with their changing environment and to adapt their lifestyle whilst preserving their identity and protecting their traditions, language and culture, but also how to include them further in political decision-making and economic development will be important questions the delegates of the Arctic Council need to answer.

#### **4. Previous Measures**

Due to the fact that the Arctic Council has only advisory status and every project etc. has to be separately funded by Member States or other institutions, the AC itself hasn't directly taken any measures. The main way of taking measures is the agreement of the Member States on reasonable and necessary laws, that every Member State can voluntarily implement in their own way and extent.

Furthermore the Arctic Council, together with its working groups, supervises various projects that address pressing issues in the region. These projects tackle everything from preparing arctic communities for the possibility of oil spills, protecting the ecosystem from invasive species or ensuring the survival of indigenous languages through digitalization, just to name a few.

Besides that, recommendations of the AC and its Working Groups had some impact on the development of international treaties. For example, the 'Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment', published 2009 by PAME, was essential for the establishment of the Polar Code ([MEPC 68/21/Add.1 Annex 10, page 3 ANNEX INTERNATIONAL CODE FOR SHIPS OPERATING IN POLAR WATERS \(POLAR CODE\) Contents](#)), which includes mandatory regulations and rule for ships operating in polar waters. Furthermore, the AC has been the forum for the legally binding 'Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic' ([AGREEMENT on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic](#)) between the eight Member States in 2013.

#### **5. Helpful Links**

- [A Quick Guide to the Arctic Council](#)
- [Maritime jurisdiction and boundaries in the Arctic region](#)
- [Here's How People Live in the Arctic](#)
- [Indigenous Entrepreneurship](#)
- [Arctic Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Way of Life](#)
- [Climate Change](#)
- [AN UPDATE TO KEY FINDINGS OF SNOW, WATER, ICE AND PERMAFROST IN THE ARCTIC \(SWIPA\) 2017](#)
- [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea](#)