

## **Fifth Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region**

**Tromsø, August 11-13, 2002**

**Report by**

**Mr. Clifford Lincoln, MP, Canada, Chair of the Standing Committee of  
Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region**

**Theme 1: The Arctic Council, activities by the Standing Committee 2000-2002**

### **1. Appreciation**

**My heartfelt thanks are extended to several individuals and institutions for a very special contribution to the work of the Standing Committee since the 2000 Conference in Rovaniemi, Finland.**

**First, my appreciation goes to the Parliament of Norway and the Norwegian Government, especially Ms. Hill-Marta Solberg, M.P., and Kjell Myhre-Jensen for making this Conference possible, and for their warm welcome and hospitality.**

**I also extend warm thanks to Finland, to Minister Jari Vilen and to the Chair, Mr. Peter Stenlund, for the Finnish presidency of the Arctic Council, and for the outstanding cooperation extended by the Council to the Standing Committee during the Finnish mandate. May I also recognize the special contribution of the Finnish Parliament in having hosted the Secretariat since the very inception of the Standing Committee. Our Secretary General, Guy Lindstrom, (and I also recognize Ms. Maarit Immonen his assistant) has been the ongoing anchor of the Standing Committee, and I cannot speak too highly of his efficiency and dedication.**

The Standing Committee is a compact organization, and because of this, a genuine kinship is built among its members. So it is sad to bid au revoir to several colleagues who have not sought, or will not seek, re-election, or have moved to other duties. May I express our deep appreciation to them: Governor Yuri Neelov, of Russia, Erik Dalheim of Norway, Dorte Bennedsen of Denmark, and Lennart Daléus of Sweden. As well to Tomas Ingi Olrich, who acceded to the Icelandic Cabinet earlier this year. We owe all of them a strong debt of gratitude, and I take this opportunity to welcome the new representatives of these countries to the Committee.

## **2. The Arctic Council**

The main objective of the Standing Committee is to further the aims and mission of the Arctic Council, through the intermediary of our respective parliaments.

A close working cooperation is developing between the Standing Committee and the Council. The last Arctic Council Ministerial in Barrow, Alaska noted with interest the recommendations of our previous conference in Rovaniemi, which have become part of the process of developing new activities. The Committee has been present at all Council and Senior Arctic Officials meetings, and wants to continue its close cooperation with the governments of the Arctic states in order to support the efforts of the Council.

An important part of successful international cooperation and global governance is an active dialogue between governments and parliamentarians. Indeed, the Conference and the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region essentially now perform all the normal functions of a parliamentary assembly in their links with an international intergovernmental organization.

**During its chairmanship, Finland has conducted a review of the work of the Arctic Council, a time-consuming exercise, considering that all decisions have to be based on consensus. The review has addressed such issues as the working groups of the Council and coordination among them, measures to support the work of the permanent participants, the secretariat and ongoing funding. The review underlines the need to engage parliamentarians effectively in the work of the Council. The review process has settled some issues that have been causing friction among working groups and in this way prepared the ground for a more constructive atmosphere for the future.**

**However, consensus has not been reached on the larger issues, i.e. concerning a permanent secretariat and funding for the Council, even if ministers at the last ministerial declared their support for achieving reliable funding for Arctic Council activities. We need to redouble our collective efforts to ensure that the Council becomes a strong international body with its own budget and funding base.**

### **3. Issues**

**Sustainable development has occupied a high priority in the work of the Standing Committee. We are very pleased with the progress the AC has made in this connection: it now has a permanent working group on sustainable development and a long list of challenging projects under way. From our point of view the most interesting of these is the Arctic Human Development Report, originally an initiative of the Arctic Parliamentarians. Our special thanks to former member Tomas Ingi Olrich of Iceland and to Kimmo Kiljunen of Finland for launching the initiative, and to Iceland for developing it further first by Mr. Olrich with the help of Drs. Oran Young, Niels Einarsson and Paula Kankaanpää, and later by the**

**Icelandic government in preparing the final project initiative for presentation to the Arctic Council. This project has received the strong support of parliamentarians, and we look forward to its formal adoption at the Ministerial in October. We are willing to work closely with Iceland during its chairmanship to make a success of this vital project which, when ready, will become an important tool for parliaments in initiating measures toward improving conditions for all residents of the Arctic. The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment will address past and present indicators of changes in climate and UV radiation, as well as potential impacts due to changes in climate and UV in the future. This US led project is perhaps the most important undertaking of the Arctic Council so far, and the USA is to be commended for this key initiative, and for also being its main funding source. The Standing Committee will follow this work closely and promote action based on its findings.**

**Good progress has also been made through the Arctic Council Action Plan to eliminate pollution in the Arctic, a program in which Norway has been particularly active.**

**The University of the Arctic has recently published a progress report on its activities. The university has in a short time made remarkable progress in the transition from planning to implementation, and some of its programs are now well under way. We encourage all governments and other bodies to give their continued strong support to this essential institution for the young generations in the Arctic. Our special thanks go to UNEP for its interest in cooperating closely with the University, as well as for its ongoing cooperation with the Standing Committee, especially through Grid-Arendal.**

#### **4. WSSD**

**From the very beginning the Arctic parliamentarians have found it very important to give the Arctic a voice in international affairs. We are encouraged by the fact that during the present AC chairmanship, great progress has been made in this respect. International fora have been addressed by the AC chair, and the Council has in particular been active in preparing an Arctic message for the WSSD in Johannesburg,**

**A special debate will be held on Arctic issues later this month during the Conference, and the importance of the Arctic in achieving a sustainable world is gradually gaining international recognition. However, this has to be seen only as a first major effort. We recognize that it will be difficult for the Arctic to occupy an important place in the texts to be approved in Johannesburg, but whatever contributes to the awareness of the Arctic in global affairs, helps build a platform for future international progress.**

**The SCPAR has been invited by the United Nations to the WSSD as an accredited observer. A member of the Norwegian parliament, Mr. Ivar Kristiansen, and myself will represent the Standing Committee at the Summit.**

#### **5. New initiatives**

**We have been successful during the past two years in moving forward the major initiatives proposed at our Rovaniemi Conference. In addition to the work in support of the AHDR, the Standing Committee is asking this conference to support and endorse several new important initiatives.**

**The most important is the continued work on a program or plan for Information Technology for the Arctic regions and serving the needs of indigenous Arctic societies. A document has been presented to you earlier today by our outgoing**

member from Sweden, Mr. Lennart Daleus, whom I want to thank very warmly for the excellence of his contribution on this issue, which was his actual initiative.

We need to develop this initiative into a concrete plan, hopefully with the support of other interested parties, such as the Northern Forum, and perhaps also the EU. Once the preparatory work is completed, I hope the Standing Committee will be able to make a direct proposal to the Arctic Council to start work in this key area.

As mentioned climate change is one of the major ongoing studies of the AC, and it will be very important for the parliamentarians not only to follow up this study closely, but also to develop concrete proposals, possibly in connection with our Conference two years hence.

The debates at this Conference on resource management will, we hope, also bring up concrete new proposals for action. The Committee has already commissioned through our Norwegian delegation a study of the present status of the Northern Sea Route, a study which gives attention to the environmental, economic and safety aspects of increasing maritime transportation in the Arctic, as a consequence of new plans for further resource development in the region.

An important part of the work of the Standing Committee during the next two-year period will also be to examine the conclusions of the WSSD for its implications and opportunities for the Arctic regions.

One future activity I suggest would be very important for the Committee to consider, is to devote more time to the monitoring of ongoing Arctic cooperative projects, where we can use our independence as parliamentarians, as well as our collective contacts and experience in working together with outside experts on a large number of policy issues.

## **6. Meetings**

**The Standing Committee has continued meeting three times a year, rotating among the different member parliaments, in addition to which members of the Committee have from time to time met with particular parliaments to address specific issues. One such meeting was held in Washington DC last year, in order to revitalize our contacts with members of the US Congress. The Standing Committee values an ongoing relationship with representatives of the Congress, the US Department of State as well as the US academic community, However, we would welcome a more consistent political participation from the Congress in our basic work, and hope it will be possible for the USA to find ways to ensure a more regular presence at the meetings of the Committee.**

**Last year the Committee also held a special meeting in Brussels with the European Parliament, an important member of the Standing Committee, in order to follow up at the EU level many issues raised at the previous Conference. We are pleased with the active involvement of the European Parliament in our work. In this connection, we are certain the Arctic Council would benefit significantly from a closer cooperation with the EU Commission, and we hope it will eventually become possible to upgrade the participation of the Commission in the work of the Council to the same level the European Parliament has enjoyed from the start in the Arctic parliamentary process.**

**The Committee regularly arranges hearings with experts and officials from national administrations in order to follow up on the work in member states, regarding issues raised in the statements approved by the Conference or otherwise taken up by the Committee.**

Several member parliaments have also arranged national or regional seminars in order to raise political awareness and sensitize opinions as to the needs of the Arctic region.

We are grateful for the support we have received from the Senior Arctic Officials of our respective countries. As well, the Permanent Participants play a key role in the Arctic Council, and enjoy the same status with the Conference and the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians. The Committee has from time to time benefited from the participation of representatives of the Saami Council, the ICC and Raipon.

However, the newer PP organizations have not, so far, been able to organize their participation, but we very much hope that new as well as initial PP organizations will take a more active role in our work in the future, though we realize economic constraints are a major hurdle in this connection.

## 7. General

I would like to recognize the contributions to the Arctic cooperation process for this Conference in the report on Arctic Governance authored by Dr. Oran Young, as well as the background paper on oil and gas written by Ms. Mette Ravn Midtgard. In order to increase access to information on the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region we maintain, with financing from the Conference host country, a website in cooperation with UNEP-Grid-Arendal. We have had discussions with the Arctic Council and its Sustainable Development Working Group on possible ways of integrating some of the information on this site with other Arctic material, and it is our hope that some of our information can be eventually updated and incorporated into the databases of the Council.

## **8. Closing Remarks**

**The value of the SCPAR lies in its flexibility as a working organization, and its ready access to its member parliaments. As such it is much more of a catalyst for practical ideas and initiatives than a project-builder.**

**It seeks above all to use its collective parliamentary energy and influence both through its Standing Committee and its Conference to advance the aims of the Arctic Council. Thus the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region looks forward to a close cooperation with the incoming Arctic Council Chair, Iceland, which counts three former members of the Standing Committee as prominent Cabinet Ministers.**