

# Circumpolar countries create Arctic Council in Canada

by Ellen Lockyer

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Delegates from eight circumpolar countries have signed a declaration that participating governments hope will herald a new era in international cooperation among Arctic nations.

The signing that created the Arctic Council took place at a conference in Ottawa, Canada, on September 19, at a ceremony chaired by Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy.

The Arctic and its future are too big for one country, one government or for one conference every two years, said Axworthy.

Participating governments are United States, Canada, Finland, Iceland, Norway,

Russia, Sweden and Denmark.

The new council is mandated to protect the fragile arctic environment, while allowing sustainable development in the region. The council was formed in response to international concern over problems of pollution and environmental degradation in the Arctic.

Another key element of the agreement is to provide for direct involvement of indigenous peoples of the Arctic in shaping the future of the region.

Indigenous peoples may not have as much input into the council as they had hoped, said Rosemary Kuptana, President of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) and a cochair of the Arctic Council Panel.

The Arctic Council Panel was set up in 1990 to lay the groundwork for the for-

mation of the council.

The ICC, along with other organizations of indigenous peoples, have been active in bringing the Arctic Council into existence.

The ICC was not among the signers of the inaugural declaration—that was a process left to the governments involved.

Kuptana said she approached the meeting with mixed feelings.

"The process leading up to this day has demonstrated to us once more the need for governments to reeducate themselves about arctic peoples and our perspectives and to come to terms with the fact that the power relationships between the government and indigenous peoples are

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