



Arctic Council
Task Force on Scientific Cooperation
Report of the co-chairs to the Senior Arctic Officials
October 2, 2014

At Kiruna, the Arctic Council Ministers decided that they hereby

agreed that cooperation in scientific research across the circumpolar Arctic is of great importance to the work of the Arctic Council, and establish a Task Force to work towards an arrangement on improved scientific research cooperation among the eight Arctic States.

As a result, under the co-chairmanship of representatives from Sweden, the Russian Federation and the United States, the Scientific Cooperation Task Force met on four occasions, with participation from all of the Arctic States, the Permanent Participants, and accredited observers. The meetings were held in Stockholm on December 10-11, 2013, Helsinki on April 8-9, 2014, Reykjavik on May 27-28, 2014, and Tromsø on September 30-October 2, 2014. During these meetings, delegations confirmed the importance of scientific research related to the Arctic, and focused in particular on the need to remove obstacles to such research and to support international projects designed to promote collaboration related to this research. The Task Force had concluded at prior meetings that a high-level instrument was the best mechanism to advance the objectives set by the Ministers, and the text of a draft Memorandum of Understanding had been under negotiation at the last meeting. In the course of these discussions, the Task Force also considered whether or not the final agreement should be legally binding. It became clear that certain objectives identified by the Task Force would benefit from the force of a legally binding agreement. As noted below, the best way to advance is to recommend to Ministers that the Task Force continue during the U.S. Chairmanship with a mandate to negotiate a legally binding agreement on this subject.

At Stockholm, and other meetings, topics of discussion included the International Polar Partnership Initiative, priorities in Arctic research, sharing of data, simplification of the

movement of people, samples and equipment across borders, research logistics and funding of possible projects and research in the Arctic.

The participants agreed that the purpose of the Task Force was not to write a new overarching list of Arctic scientific priorities but to compare existing national priorities in order to see where there are common objectives and possible gaps.

At Helsinki, Arctic States presented their lists of national research priorities and the meeting compiled these into a list of shared priorities. From this exercise, it was clear that there are many shared national research priorities among the Arctic States, and that these priorities are also shared by international science planning bodies. At the end of the meeting, delegations concurred that the discussions had been substantive and fruitful and formed a basis for the Task Force to proceed, at its next meeting, to begin negotiation of a memorandum of understanding or other instrument, ultimately for presentation to Ministers.

In Reykjavik, the Task Force made progress on developing the text of a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding. Delegations agreed that this text contained many valuable elements that can form the basis for further discussions. During the deliberations, a number of delegations felt that it would be preferable to present a legally binding agreement to Ministers, although further review was needed on this point.

At Tromsø, Vladimir Barbin of Russia and Evan Bloom of the United States shared the duties with respect to chairing the meeting. The Task Force noted the very positive and valuable work that had been done at these meetings addressing access to data, access to scientific infrastructure and research areas, and simplification of movement of scientists and their equipment and samples, all which relate to the goal of enhancing scientific cooperation in the Arctic. Delegations suggested that this progress be reflected in the SAO's report to Ministers, as well as in the Ministerial Declaration.

At this meeting, delegations agreed to recommend to the SAOs that the Ministers be asked to support a continued mandate for the Task Force, with a view to its producing a text of a legally binding agreement during the U.S. chairmanship. As a result, delegations discussed in some detail elements that could be included in a legally binding agreement, using the draft MOU as a starting point. They also discussed many underlying issues, including the scope of the agreement, relevant issues related to customs and border regulations and the role of non-parties in relation to the agreement.

Delegations discussed the possibility of holding a further meeting, tentatively scheduled for February 25-26, 2015, to be held in Norway. In advance of the meeting, the delegations of Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States undertook to prepare a draft agreement, and to circulate this agreement for review by Arctic State and Permanent Participant delegations six weeks in advance of the meeting. Comments on the draft received within four weeks thereafter by the Secretariat would be incorporated or otherwise communicated by the Secretariat, and the co-chairs would distribute this draft two weeks in advance of the meeting.

It was recognized that as the next meeting would involve negotiation of an agreement, the participation of all Arctic States was important, and that the meeting would only go forward if all Arctic State delegations are ready to proceed at that point.

The co-chairs, on behalf of all delegations, expressed their profound appreciation to the Kingdom of Norway for hosting the meeting in Tromsø, and for offering to host the next meeting of the Task Force.