



**Meeting of the International Group of Funding Agencies  
for Global Change Research (IGFA)**

**Draft statement of Ambassador Gunnar Pálsson  
Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials**

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Thank you for this opportunity to address the International Group of Funding Agencies for Global Change Research (IGFA). If for no other reason than the name given to your group, it would seem that the Arctic Council and IGFA have important areas in common. Like you, we are concerned with “global change”. We are keen on “research” and - surprising as it may sound - take special interest in “funding”.

By way of introduction, I would like to tell you briefly about the Arctic Council, what it is and how it works. The Arctic Council is a circumpolar forum involving both governments and indigenous peoples’ organizations. In addition, there is extensive pan-Arctic cooperation at other levels, among parliamentarians, regional and municipal authorities, and the academic and research communities. The Arctic Council affords us a means to bring together most of those actors, directly or indirectly, in a coherent framework.

In some ways, the Arctic Council works in parallel with the Antarctic Treaty organization, in particular as regards the protection of the environment and the earth’s ecosystem. However, whereas the Antarctic is a special conservation area, the inhabitants of the Arctic make use of the region’s rich natural resources for their livelihood and social and economic development. Also, unlike the Antarctic Treaty organization, the Arctic Council has no permanent secretariat.

One of the characteristic features of the Arctic Council is how it finances its different projects. All projects of the Council are financed on a voluntary basis, as the Council does not have a budget of its own. This system offers certain flexibility and has worked quite well. However, the Member States have lately been exploring ways of making the mechanism for funding Arctic Council projects even more efficient. To this end, the Chairmanship is working, in regular consultation with the Arctic Council members and in close cooperation with the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO), to develop a concept for a possible Arctic Council Project Support Fund. Time will show whether circumstances are ripe for taking steps towards the establishment of such a fund later this year.

### **Filling the knowledge gap**

A large part of the work of the Arctic Council is science-based. Different working groups engage to some extent in efforts to fill the gaps in our existing circumpolar knowledge, covering new areas or areas where information has been either scarce or hard to access. Examples of this include two major assessments of pollution in the Arctic, showing, among other things, rising trends of mercury contamination in some areas of the region and the Arctic Human Development Report on cultural, social and economic conditions in the Arctic.

The brunt of our science-based work has been concentrated in the area of the environment, on issues like biological diversity and the monitoring and assessment of pollution. Published work in those areas showcases some of the best work done by the Arctic Council.

### **Making a difference**

Increasingly, the Arctic Council is turning its attention to the other pillars of sustainable development. This is necessary, because physical processes in the Arctic environment are beginning to affect the lives and the livelihoods of Arctic residents. It is also logical for the simple reason that if the Arctic Council is to be a forum devoted to sustainable development, it needs to highlight also the cultural, social and economic dimensions of life in the Arctic. In other words, the Arctic Council is not a forum exclusively for studying the Arctic in order to improve our understanding of it. We also want to make a difference in people's lives, to help them cope and to adapt to the changes sweeping through the North.

This is why the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, currently held by Iceland, has sought, in cooperation with the members, to recalibrate the thematic relationship between nature and society in the Arctic. Environmental concerns will remain at the core of our work. But we will always need to bear in mind that the Arctic is not some figment of our romantic imagination, but home, first and foremost, to people. This is why the Chairmanship has sought to emphasize areas like improved coordination of Arctic science and research, the application of information and communications technologies and Arctic human development.

### **Crossing from science to policy**

Nevertheless, to make the crossing from scientific observation and explanation to specific policies or actions addressing the impacts identified through the work of science is rarely a straightforward task. We here come to the difficulty of the science - policy interface, that I have been asked to address today. Let me give you a handful of examples, in an ascending order of complexity, of how this difficulty has been known to manifest itself in the work of the Arctic Council.

I will start with an example of a relatively problem-free endeavor to bridge the science - policy gap, the relationship between the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) and the Arctic Council Action Plan (ACAP). As a direct follow-up of the AMAP monitoring and assessment work, the ACAP was set up to address the sources of pollution identified by AMAP, involving several priority projects set out to reduce pollution in the Arctic, including projects on cleaner production and control of PCBs, obsolete pesticides and dioxins, all of which are priority pollutants under the Stockholm Convention.

It is during the interval between the identification of a problem and the adoption of an appropriate action programme to deal with it, that the issue of financing tends to become most acute, for this is the phase where funds related to studies of project pre-feasibility and start-up must be produced. Understandably, perhaps, the suggestion to set up an Arctic Council Project Support Fund originated with ACAP.

Turning to another example that has been in the forefront of Arctic Council activities, the plot begins to thicken. Since you have invited the ACIA project leader, who also happens to be one of the pioneers of the IGFA, to address you, I will try to deal very briefly with the challenging issue of climate change.

The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) is a comprehensive regionally based study of climate change, carried out under the auspices of the Arctic Council, in cooperation with the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC). The ACIA documents and describes how climate change is affecting the North. It contains projections as to what we can expect to happen in the future. Among other things, the assessment concludes that temperatures in the Arctic are rising at twice the global average, causing sea-ice reduction and rising sea levels, as well as changes in permafrost, that will affect important aspects of life in the Arctic in decades to come.

Among the key arguments made is that the source of climate change are to a significant extent anthropomorphic; through the emission of greenhouse gases into the earth's atmosphere, fossil-fuel based industrial society is in large part responsible for the phenomenon of climate change. If that is the case, then it also stands to reason that climate change itself could and should be arrested and even reversed through human enterprise. Having identified a key source of the problem, is there anything to prevent us from adopting the programmes necessary to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions?

As everyone here knows, the problem is not that simple. Observation and evaluation tend to be a complex process. While the majority of views may be marshaled on one side of the argument, views also differ. Even if they agreed on the causes of climate change, scientists might still disagree on what should be done about it or at what cost. There are questions of fairness and equity. How are the burdens of dealing with the impacts of climate change to be parceled out among the countries of the world and who should adjudicate between them? We no sooner take leave of the science proper than we enter the realm of political discourse, where economic, social and moral choices need to be made.

Within the Arctic Council the problem is cast in terms of observation, monitoring and research on the impacts of climate change on the one hand and adaptation to and mitigation of such impacts on the other. The former is the prerogative of scientists, the latter of governments. In dealing with that problem, we must resist the temptation to think that science *qua* science can prescribe what is to be done about climate change. Failure to do so would be detrimental to the practice of science and incompatible with the scientific method itself.

Of course, this should not prevent Arctic Council Member States from making judgments about or responding to the findings science has produced in the area of climate change. At the moment, member states, in cooperation with indigenous peoples' organizations, are hard at work on recommendations to Ministers regarding policy responses to the Arctic climate impact assessment.

The two preceding examples apply to the relationship between the findings of natural science and the policies set out in response to them. But what about the social sciences and the humanities? As we speak, an Arctic Council publication called the Arctic Human Development Report is going to print. This will be the first comprehensive attempt to document and compare systematically the welfare of Arctic residents on a circumpolar basis. By focusing attention on the cultural, social and economic aspects of life in the Arctic, the report will hopefully provide much needed

guidance to the Arctic Council's ongoing work in the area of sustainable development.

There is a long tradition, as everyone knows, insisting on subjecting the social studies to the canon of science. Spinoza, as early as the eighteenth century, promised to "consider human actions and appetites just as if it was a question of lines, planes and solids". Such a strict method is fortunately no longer demanded of the social sciences. Nevertheless, we would normally expect the student of social phenomena to uphold at least the same standards of factual inquiry and explanation as the natural scientist.

Lead authors involved in the compilation of the Arctic Human Development Report, have brought different backgrounds and perspectives to their task. It is they who will be ultimately responsible for the views put across in the chapters of the report. Therefore, the report should not be regarded as a politically negotiated document. While mandated by governments, it neither reflects the joint position of the Arctic Council nor the policies of its member states. At the same time, it is essential that governments respond to the report and consider an appropriate follow-up within the framework of the Arctic Council.

### **A forum for dialogue**

Therefore, in distinguishing as far as possible between science on the one hand and policy on the other, the Arctic Council member states in no way wish to disavow the excellent work carried out under the umbrella of the Arctic Council in areas like climate change or human development. Quite the contrary, it is only by keeping the two domains separate that meaningful dialogue can be pursued between them. Governments should promote science. But scientists should leave it to governments to make the difficult choices that invariably arise when an effort is made to draw lessons from science in terms of public policy.

In the few years that the Arctic Council has been around, it has proven itself to be an innovative forum, holding up as an example to the world a pattern of cooperation between governments and indigenous peoples in the circumpolar region. The same might be said for the model of interaction now taking shape in the interface between Arctic science and policy. It is by serving as a forum for dialogue and coordination between scientists and governments, that the Arctic Council can, in the coming years, best contribute to the betterment of living conditions in the world's northernmost regions.