ARCTIC FUTURES
SYMPOSIUM
2014

Arctic Futures Symposium – Summary for the Press

The International Polar Foundation established the Arctic Futures Symposium in 2010 to provide a forum for the open discussion of Arctic issues between a wide variety of stakeholders and policymakers. Every year, participation in the Symposium has grown, reflecting the ever-increasing interest in the Arctic region and this – the fifth Arctic Futures Symposium – looks to be the busiest ever.

The symposium allows for ease of participation of the European Institutions in Brussels, effectively bringing the Arctic to EU decision makers and exposing them to a balance of stakeholder opinion and lively and informed discussion as they continue to develop EU policy on the Arctic. Participants include local and national policymakers, Arctic indigenous peoples, academics and representatives of industries with interests in the Arctic region.

Canada currently holds the 2-year chairmanship of the Arctic Council (2013-15) and has outlined the theme "development for the people of the North," including responsible Arctic resource development, safe Arctic shipping and sustainable circumpolar communities. In line with this, the 2014 Arctic Futures Symposium will focus on the people of the Arctic and economies of the Circumpolar North.

The Arctic is home to around 4 million people, with around 10% of those people from around 40 different ethnic indigenous groups. These groups include the Inuit (Inuvialuit), First Nations and Métis in Canada Inuit (Iñupiat), Aleut and Yupik in Alaska; Inuit (Kalaallit) in Greenland; Saami (Scandinavia, NW Russia); and Nenets, Khanty, Evenk, Sakha (Yakut) and Chuckchi in Russia. Indigenous groups in the Arctic generally have a connection to the land and have their own culture, language and traditions. Some groups have formed organizations to represent themselves as development in the Arctic, social changes and environmental pressures such as climate change pose threats to their way of life.

Changes in the Arctic include increased oil and mineral exploitation, fisheries, tourism and shipping. Many of the small communities still have predominantly subsistence or mixed cash and subsistence economies. In the Kiruna Declaration signed in May 2013, the Arctic Council recognised that "Arctic economic endeavors are integral to sustainable development for peoples and communities in the region" and agreed to set up a new circumpolar business forum which will be known as the Arctic Economic Council. The Council aims to foster business development in the Arctic, engage in deeper circumpolar cooperation and provide a business perspective to the work of the Arctic Council.

The Symposium will include a roundtable discussion with diplomatic representatives from the eight Arctic Council nations, their territories and the European External Action Service. This will be followed by a discussion focussing on security perspectives and challenges in the Arctic. A selection of experts in science and social science disciplines will then present their recent research to inform policy makers about various aspects of the changing Arctic.

On the second day of the Symposium there will be a roundtable discussion with representatives of indigenous Arctic communities and members of the European Parliament, followed by more specific discussions about the economies of the different Arctic regions.

Open dialogue will help ensure that development in the Arctic is sustainable, respecting both the environment and the rights and interests of Arctic inhabitants. The Arctic Futures Symposium allows stakeholders and decision makers to discuss Arctic issues in a friendly and cooperative way. It is the largest event of its type in Brussels.

Elizabeth Van Den Bergh
Media Relations
International Polar Foundation
press@polarfoundation.org
+ 32 (0) 485 853 823
#ArcticFutures
www.arcticfutures.org

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rue de la Loi 155 C
1040 Brussels