

TOWARD AN ARCTIC ZONE OF PEACE: AN INUIT PERSPECTIVE

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# **TOWARD AN ARCTIC ZONE OF PEACE: AN INUIT PERSPECTIVE**

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The Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) is an international organization whose head office is currently in Canada. Since 1983, the ICC has enjoyed non-governmental organization (NGO) status at the United Nations. ICC members are Inuit from Alaska, Canada and Greenland. Currently, we are taking steps to ensure the active involvement in the ICC of Inuit from the Soviet Union. At our 1989 General Assembly it was an historic event when Soviet Inuit were allowed by the Soviet government to attend our triennial meeting for the first time.

We believe that the nature and spirit of ongoing collaboration that takes place within the ICC goes a long way in itself in promoting peace. This cooperation among Inuit from four Arctic countries has begun to be translated into common positions and initiatives on specific issues, such as militarization.

In addressing Arctic peace and security matters, it is a vital starting point to recognize that vast regions in northern Canada, Alaska, Greenland and eastern Siberia constitute first and foremost the Inuit homeland. We do not wish our traditional territories to be treated as a strategic military and combat zone between eastern and Western alliances. For thousands of years, Inuit have used and continue to use the lands, waters and sea-ice in circumpolar regions. As aboriginal people, we are the Arctic's legitimate spokespersons.

Since our northern lands and communities transcend the boundaries of four countries we are in a unique position to promote peace, security and arms control objectives among Arctic states. Any excessive military build-up in the North, whether by the Soviet Union or the United States, only serves to divide the Arctic, perpetuate East-West tensions and the arms race, and put our people on opposing sides. For these and other reasons, Arctic militarization is not in the interests of Inuit who live in Canada, the Soviet Union, Alaska and Greenland. Nor do such military preparations further security or world peace.

At the ICC General Assembly in Sisimiut, Greenland in July 1989, Inuit delegates mandated our organization to actively support measures toward an Arctic zone of peace that would foster international cooperation and be nuclear-weapon-free. It is our firm view that the concept of establishing a transnational zone of peace is growing both in importance and urgency.

The global arms race involving cruise missiles is having a particularly adverse impact in the Arctic. The more that cruise missiles are used by the superpowers, the more we can expect an arms build-up in Arctic airspace and waters. If these strategic arsenals of the Soviet Union and the United States continue to grow, the ability of Canada and the Nordic states to influence or regulate activities in the Arctic will severely diminish. In this context, the sovereignty of such Arctic states may be rendered virtually meaningless.

The ICC feels that Arctic-rim governments are not meeting their responsibilities in the face of growing Arctic militarization. They are not taking effective measures to prevent and protect our northern homeland from becoming a new strategic military zone for East-West competition and conflict.

Expensive air defence systems, cruise missile development and testing, and other weapons systems are proceeding in northern areas. Once in place, this arms race will be extremely difficult to reverse. As for other arms races, the alleged need for new and improved weapons and support systems in the Arctic could well be never-ending.

The ICC welcomes the idea of seriously working towards the formal creation of a transnational Arctic zone of peace. We recognize that Arctic state governments do not appear to be in favour of immediately establishing the whole Arctic as a zone of peace should at least be accepted as an explicit and central objective. This goal should be appropriately integrated in the arms control policies and agendas of the Arctic nations concerned.

### **Inuit Perspectives on an Arctic Zone of Peace**

In his October 1987 speech in Murmansk, Soviet leader Gorbachev proposed measures to radically lower the level of military confrontation in the Arctic and formally create a zone of peace. The suggested Soviet

measures were not fully elaborated and, in any event, did not appear to be satisfactory to other Arctic states. Yet no counter-proposals have ever been put forward by Canada, the Nordic countries or the NATO alliance itself.

It is also worth noting that in 1971, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 2832 (XXVI) declaring the Indian Ocean to be a zone of peace. This resolution has never been fully implemented for a number of political and military reasons linked to that specific region.

It is important to emphasize that the Arctic is not faced with the same internal conflicts or invasions that affect the states in the Indian Ocean region. The Arctic is still a far more stable region than the Indian Ocean and could set a powerful example worldwide as a zone of peace.

From an Inuit viewpoint, an Arctic zone of peace should include the following principles and elements:

- 1) Any zone of peace in the Arctic must foster international cooperation for solely peaceful purposes and must be nuclear-weapons-free.
- 2) No testing of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction would be permissible.
- 3) As a general rule, the safeguarding of the Arctic environment must take precedence over military exercises and activities.
- 4) Peacetime military activities that disrupt or undermine the communities, territories, rights and security of aboriginal and other northern peoples would not be allowed. For example, the low-level and supersonic flight testing and training that seriously affect Innu and Inuit in Labrador and northern Quebec are unacceptable activities.
- 5) International and national systems of verification pertaining to arms control would be encouraged.

In order to maximize its positive effects an Arctic zone of peace should be created by international agreement which includes among the parties all nuclear-weapons powers (especially the Soviet Union and the United States). In view of the far-reaching changes in government policies that would be necessary in order to create a true zone of peace it may be more feasible to begin with agreement on one or more smaller areas, such as the Arctic Ocean. But it is critical that expanding such peace zones to include ever-increasing portions of the Arctic should be the explicit goal.

### **Proposed Steps Toward an Arctic Zone of Peace**

The ICC recognizes that an Arctic zone of peace, by itself, would not ensure Arctic or global peace and security. On the other hand, the pursuit of global measures alone will not prevent an arms build-up in the North. In the absence of persistent assertions for protective Arctic positions, Canada and

the Nordic states will inevitably be caught up in the militarization of the Arctic and a spiralling polar arms race.

For all of these reasons, we believe that the arms control agenda of the superpowers and other Arctic states must begin to include Arctic-specific, as well as global, measures.

In order to reverse the trend of Arctic militarization and move toward the creation of an Arctic zone of peace, we would propose the following measures (among others):

1) The establishment of a zone of peace throughout the Arctic (possibly by increments) should be declared by Arctic nations to be a central objective. A multilateral process involving Arctic countries must be put into place to progress towards this goal.

2) There must be an express commitment by Arctic states that their future military and arms control policies will be consistent with the objective of a zone of peace. For example, Canadian and Nordic state territory must not be used by any country for offensive and destabilizing military purposes.

3) If the development of new and more threatening weapons is to be prevented, active support for a comprehensive test ban (CTB) on nuclear weapons is essential. A CTB must be a mainstay of Canadian and Nordic government policy, despite current US and British opposition.

4) Arctic states should insist on a complete ban on all air- and sea-launched cruise missiles. A total ban would be highly beneficial in terms of restraining militarization in the Arctic and elsewhere.

5) Agreement should be sought that no nuclear weapons will be carried aboard aircraft or naval vessels during peacetime. We do not believe that there are any compelling reasons for this practice. Such a global measure would be welcome in the Arctic and elsewhere, particularly from an environmental viewpoint. It would prevent radioactive accidents such as the US B-52 bomber crash near Thule, Greenland in 1968 when four hydrogen bombs were aboard.

6) Arctic states, either alone or as part of NATO, must respond to the invitation of the Soviet government to put forward fair and balanced proposals for at least reducing the massive Soviet arms build-up in the Kola peninsula.

7) It is imperative to examine how naval uses of the Arctic and other seas might be limited in advancing arms control and the common security of all nations. The principle of unrestricted 'freedom of navigation' on the high seas is out-dated and open to abuse by military powers.

8) Arctic states must seriously contribute to the further development of an international legal framework that codifies offences against the peace

*Cont. from p. 30.*

and security of humankind. International standards should also include such emerging human rights as the right to peace, the right to development and the right to a safe and healthy environment.

9) Arctic states must promote increased recognition within the international community of the illegality of nuclear weapons and take concrete measures to move away from reliance on nuclear deterrence as a means of preventing war. New and effective non-nuclear strategies must be devised toward common security that also includes major environmental concerns.

In developing and implementing the above measures, we would urge the non-nuclear-weapon states in the North to substantially increase their degree of collaboration. Real progress in terms of arms control and Arctic peace and security is possible, but only if Canada and the Nordic countries are willing to initiate and maintain concerted pressure on both superpowers.

The numerous measures I have outlined are evidence of the difficult challenges all of us face in seeking to ensure a nuclear-free Arctic and formally create a zone of peace. The complexities we encounter must not deter us.

The Inuit Circumpolar Conference firmly believes that Canada and other Arctic states must clearly identify their Arctic interests and concerns. This must be done in collaboration with indigenous peoples in circumpolar regions.

We urge all Arctic governments, regardless of their military affiliation or nuclear status, to embrace the idea of an Arctic zone of peace. If at the very least the objective of seriously striving towards a zone of peace through a formalized process is fully accepted, we will be taking a significant step towards the common security and well-being of all humankind. For those of us whose ancestral home is and always will be the Arctic and who maintain the vision of a peaceful and life-sustaining environment, we believe that the future of the North merits no less!

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