

# News release

GREENPEACE

## **New report questions Arctic Council's ability to fulfill environmental mandate**

**23 April 2015 (Iqaluit)** – An independent report written by Arctic experts and commissioned by Greenpeace questions the governance structure of the Arctic Council and signals flaws in its current functioning.

The report [\*The Practice and Promise of the Arctic Council\*](#), written by Dr. Terry Fenge and Bernard Funston and released on the eve of the Arctic Council's bi-annual Ministerial Meeting in Iqaluit, reviews the accomplishments and inherent limitations of the Council and provides recommendations for how the forum may improve its environmental track record in the future.

As the report explains, the Arctic Council was created as an international forum without legal status that relies on consensus-based decision making across eight sovereign states. Decisions made at the Council are never mandatory and States are at liberty to pull out of agreements at any time. "The Council was set up to discuss, inform and potentially shape decisions by national governments, but certainly not to make them," say Fenge and Funston. Moreover, the authors say it would be "extremely difficult" to evaluate if any of the Council's scientific or technical reports ever result in actionable policy.

Another major shortcoming of the Council is the fact that the forum does not have an agreed upon definition for 'sustainable development.' Fenge and Funston explain that within the Council, "best practices in sustainable development tend to lie in the eye of the beholder."

Greenpeace Canada Arctic Campaigner Farrah Khan explains: "Because the Arctic Council has not set a definition for 'sustainable development' the term has been misused and exploited to no end. A most recent example is in the founding document of the Arctic Economic Council which purports to foster sustainable development, but in reality has become an assembly of oil companies and businesses that support extractive industries."

The authors also mention that the Arctic Council has failed to adequately fund Permanent Participants — six Indigenous organizations that participate in the Council but do not have decision making power. In one of its key conclusions, the report encourages Member States to provide Permanent Participants with adequate funding and assistance in order to realize one of the commitments included in the [\*Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council\*](#): "Active participation and full consultation with the Arctic Indigenous representatives within the Arctic Council."

Chief Gary Harrison of the Arctic Athabaskan Council, a Permanent Participant of the Arctic Council, coauthored an opinion editorial on the release of today's report that states: "Another way the Council could support Permanent Participants is if Arctic states acted on recommendations laid out in an open letter addressed to the Council in September 2014. Here, all six Permanent Participants reminded the Canadian Chair of the Arctic Council's commitment to limit global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius."

Tomorrow's Ministerial meeting is taking place as Shell continues to move towards its drilling season in the Alaskan Arctic, which will devastate coastal communities if an oil spill occurs. Before committing the Arctic and its peoples to such an irreversible course of action, the report recommends that "the Arctic Council undertake a rigorous discussion within the Council of the standing, practical dimensions, utility and application of the concept of sustainable development in the Arctic."

–30–

**For more information:**

**In Montreal:** Diego Creimer, Communications Officer, 514-999-6743  
[dcreimer@greenpeace.org](mailto:dcreimer@greenpeace.org)

**In Iqaluit:** Alex Speers-Roesch, Arctic Campaigner, 416-807-4955  
[alex.speers.roesch@greenpeace.org](mailto:alex.speers.roesch@greenpeace.org)

**Complementary briefing documents:**

Canada's Record as Arctic Council Chair <http://bit.ly/1Fenpn5>

Expectations for the US Arctic Council Chairship <http://bit.ly/1JbWyKK>