

# Sweden Assumes the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council

*Gustaf Lind*

Ambassador to the Arctic  
Swedish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council

Sweden assumed the chairmanship of the Arctic Council at its ministerial meeting in Nuuk, Greenland in May 2011 and will lead, over the next two years, its work on many important and challenging tasks. The Arctic Council is the primary forum for cooperation between the Arctic states. Sweden intends to make use of its chairmanship to undertake substantial projects for the benefit of the people of the Arctic, to introduce more policymaking in the Council and to strengthen further the role of the Council and the relevance of its work. The Arctic Council should reflect the common vision of the Arctic states in order to promote effective cooperation in the region.

Despite challenges, cooperation in the Arctic is characterized by a low level of conflict and broad consensus. As Chair of the Arctic Council, Sweden wants to give priority to issues that will promote sustainable development in the Arctic region, in constructive cooperation between the Arctic states and with the involvement of the indigenous peoples of the region. Activities and cooperation in the Arctic must be based on international law, including UN conventions and other international agreements.

As an Arctic country, Sweden is familiar with the challenges facing the Arctic region, its peoples, animals and flora. The Arctic is one of the most sensitive ecosystems in the world. Developments there have consequences on a global scale.

The most important measure for limiting Arctic warming is to reduce emissions of long-lived greenhouse gases, above all carbon dioxide. Sweden therefore would like to highlight further the particular consequences of global warming for the Arctic in international climate forums, with a view to achieving more ambitious global emissions reductions. In the shorter term, measures that reduce the presence of short-lived climate forcers (SLCF),\* such as black carbon, ozone and methane, can play a significant role in mitigating climate change, particularly at the regional level.

The Swedish chairmanship also intends to undertake a project on the resilience of Arctic nature and communities, i.e. their capacity to manage and overcome disturbances. The resilience project is part of the proposed major project, Arctic Change Assessment (ACA), which aims to identify the processes affecting the Arctic and shed light on how we can strengthen the capacity of natural and social systems to adapt to future change. Other priorities with regard to environmental and climatic issues include studies on biodiversity and environmental protection.

---

\* *Editor's Note: Climate forcers are gases/particles that absorb or reflect radiation, thus altering the energy balance. Short-lived climate forcers stay in the atmosphere for a few days or weeks whereas long-lived climate forcers stay in the atmosphere for hundreds of years.*

Around four million people live north of the Arctic Circle. The Arctic is the homeland of a large number of indigenous peoples. Sweden will make it a high priority to engage with them and to promote their interests. The representation of indigenous people in all Arctic Council bodies plays a unique role in shaping the activities of the Council in all areas.

Positive and sustainable economic development in the Arctic region is of vital importance for the population of the Arctic. The Arctic Council will initiate a discussion, in cooperation with the business community, on how to strengthen such development.

The Arctic is rich in natural resources. Engaging in commercial activities while avoiding or minimizing risks to the region's environment and inhabitants is a great challenge. It must be done in a responsible and sustainable manner, so that developments in the Arctic benefit the region and do not lead to undesired effects. This is indeed a balancing act that the whole international community is facing, but it is particularly relevant and challenging in the Arctic region. It tests our ability to work together.

One example of this challenge that is high on the agenda concerns the risk of accidents associated with transportation and extraction of oil in the Arctic. Sweden places a priority on efforts to secure an agreement on preparedness and response to oil spills, ensuring that the Arctic states will be able to deal with such events.

Additionally, food safety and access to good quality water are matters of constant concern for the inhabitants of the region, and they will be addressed by the Arctic Council.

The Swedish chairmanship seeks to strengthen the Arctic Council and its work. The scientific work of the Council's working groups should be linked to practical decision-making and policies. We need concrete efforts to combat real problems. The agreement signed in Nuuk on search and rescue operations in the Arctic is a good example. It was the first legally binding agreement negotiated under the auspices of the Arctic Council. Sweden also will seek to ensure appropriate follow-up action is undertaken with respect to previously adopted recommendations. The Council's work should be guided by openness and flexibility to enable it to address topical issues.

As Chair of the Arctic Council, Sweden will spearhead the implementation of the reform package approved by the ministers in Nuuk, including the establishment of a permanent secretariat of the Arctic Council in Tromsø, Norway and a revision of its rules and procedures.

Moreover, Sweden will work to strengthen the communications and outreach of the Arctic Council, including through its Web site, to promote a fact-based understanding of the Arctic region and to explain the mission of the organization.

As Sweden assumes the chairmanship of the Arctic Council, we look forward to working on all aspects of the Arctic agenda in close cooperation with the United States, an important Arctic country, and all other Arctic states.