

A photograph of a snow-capped mountain peak under a cloudy sky, serving as a background for the title.

Arctic NGO forum

Statement by the Arctic NGO Forum at its first meeting in Arendal, Norway 19 - 20 January 2012

The Arctic is vital to the Earth's cooling system and its environment is unique and fragile. Arctic marine and terrestrial ecosystems provide a variety of ecosystem services, which are of fundamental importance to the livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. However, the image of a frozen, timeless Arctic is being dramatically altered by each new scientific study, replaced by a new reality of rapid change. Governments are staking their claims to the offshore at the same time as industry begins to focus on the economic opportunities that come with an ice-free Arctic. More than ever before, the Arctic is on the geopolitical agenda.

Non-governmental organizations are looking at what this change means for Arctic ecosystems and human well-being. However, few mechanisms exist for NGOs concerned with Arctic environmental issues to get together, exchange ideas and perspectives and develop common strategies to influence policy makers.

A new Arctic NGO Forum has been created which held its first meeting recently in Arendal, Norway. It will be a platform for civil society dialogue, collaboration and action on Arctic issues.

We, the Arctic NGO Forum, will:

1. Promote better cooperation among NGOs to increase their effectiveness and influence with decision-makers, both public and private;
2. Increase NGOs' ability to use scarce resources in Arctic fora by sharing knowledge and information, and building capacity;
3. Create opportunities for understanding and dialogue between NGOs and Indigenous and local people in the Arctic;
4. Raise awareness about the threats to the Arctic environment and their potential solutions;
5. Use the forum as a way to identify emerging issues and place them on the public agenda.

The Forum will meet regularly and will organize workshops with wide participation to address the critical challenges facing the Arctic.

Among the meeting participants were the Arctic Alliance, Bellona Foundation, International Polar Foundation, Indigenous Peoples Secretariat, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, University of the Arctic, and Wetlands International. Other organizations have expressed interest and the Forum membership is expected to grow.

The Forum is coordinated jointly by UNEP/GRID-Arendal and Ecorys.

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