

Ottawa Journal: Arctic Conference ? Whitehorse 2014

The Parliament of Canada, under the auspices of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association, hosted the 11th Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region from September 9 to 11, 2014, in Whitehorse, Yukon.

As the President of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association, it was my privilege to have presided over the meetings. I acted as Co-Chair along with the Chair of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, Sara Olsvig, M.P. from Denmark.

As Co-Chairs of the Conference, Ms. Olsvig and I welcomed 100 delegates representing Parliaments of the eight Arctic states (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and U.S.A) and the European Parliament; indigenous peoples' organizations; and parliaments of nations and organizations that have observer status at the Arctic Council.

I was most impressed by the excellent presentations, the thoughtful discussions, and not least, the spirit of friendship and cooperation. Following two days of presentations, along with questions and answers by representatives from a cross sector of business, academia, and government, there was a Conference Statement adopted and agreed upon by all of the Arctic states represented. Topics included: sustainable infrastructure, governance models and decision making processes, enhancing northern economics, and environmental challenges.

I am proud to have played a role in collectively adopting many goals that focus on the following:

? improve infrastructure in support of economic growth and traditional northern livelihood, fisheries, and agriculture;

? secure the role of indigenous peoples in the various governance regimes of the circumpolar world, particularly at the Arctic Council;

? integrate the communities of science, politics, business, and local peoples in order to innovate and build thriving and sustainable Northern economies;

? recommendations that recognize the rights of the people of the Arctic to secure their livelihoods through the sale of traditional products.

The Parliament of Canada actively supports Arctic parliamentary cooperation and Arctic Council initiatives under Canada's Chairmanship of the Arctic Council. I believe this conference to have truly been an excellent example of what can be accomplished when countries work together to improve the lives of their citizens.

During the Arctic Conference, delegates were pleased to receive news of the discovery of one of the ships belonging to the ill-fated Franklin Expedition which was lost in 1846. This was exciting news for all of us, as well as all Canadians because this represents the solving of a great Canadian mystery.

It was most fitting that one of the Franklin ships was discovered during the Arctic Conference when Canada was hosting this important forum for parliamentarians from Arctic nations. This find helps confirm Canada's sovereignty in the North.

By David Tilson, MP