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**Climate Change
and Arctic Sustainable Development :
scientific, social, cultural and educational challenges**

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**ABSTRACT:
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS**

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The Need for Arctic Data (Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks - SAON)

The Arctic is undergoing considerable changes due to climate change, contamination, biodiversity loss and changes to the physical environment, which have serious impacts both inside and outside the Arctic. Trends indicate that the severity of the impacts is projected to increase in the near future. Natural capital and prospects for human development may be undermined.

Arctic countries and their people are faced with new environmental, economic and social challenges. Global activities affect the Arctic environment while changes in the Arctic environment have global consequences. Hence, the broader global community must be engaged in improved monitoring of the Arctic to better understand the changes and their affects, and must address the social and human dimension in Arctic observations.

The need for comprehensive, sustained and interdisciplinary Arctic observations and data management has been identified previously in several international reports (ACIA, ICARP II etc.) The International Polar Year 2007-2008 (IPY) provided an opportunity to initiate new observing activities in the Arctic. However, we do not know which of these programmes will survive in the long-term.

The present status of Arctic data is that they are mostly fragmentary, hard to find or access, lacking pan-Arctic coverage etc. This distressing state of affairs has been realised by many user groups, and prompted the Arctic Council (a high level intergovernmental body with all Arctic states and Arctic indigenous peoples as regular members) to agree in their Salekhard Declaration (November 2006) to:

"Urge all Member countries to maintain and extend long term monitoring of change in all parts of the Arctic, and request the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program to

cooperate with other Arctic Council Working Groups, the International Arctic Science Committee and other partners in efforts to create a coordinated Arctic observing network, that meets identified societal needs”

This initiative has become known as the ‘SAON process’ in which the Arctic Council and 12 other international organisations have made a joint effort to identify a strategy for ‘Sustained Arctic Observing Networks’ (SAON), as well as identifying actions to be taken.

The SAON process has so far consisted of 3 major international workshops, 2 regional meetings and numerous consultations. A special effort has been made to have all observing communities (governmental agencies, scientists, and local/indigenous communities) well represented, as well as participation of all sorts of users and stakeholders.

The SAON Report (‘Observing the Arctic’) was finalised in December 2008, and is now under consideration by the Arctic Council and the other organisations involved. The final discussion of the SAON Report, including actions to be taken, is expected at the Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in April 2009.

The SAON recommendations include advice to national governments on actions to be taken on sustaining and increasing current level of observing activities; creating a data dissemination protocol to make data and information freely, openly and easily accessible; establish national inter-agency group to coordinate and integrate their Arctic observing activities; and finally to welcome non-Arctic states and international organisations as partners.

The basic SAON strategy is to:

- Build on existing (or developing) networks (governmental agencies, research, community-based), aiming at covering all the Arctic, meeting all societal needs, and collecting data long-term;
- Focus on making networks meeting societal needs sustained (funded long-term); and
- Address a number of key issues that transcend individual networks or national capabilities.

Recommendations:

All observing and data networks being presented at the UNESCO Monaco meeting are or will fit under the SAON umbrella, and will benefit from this initiative. Consequently, the UNESCO Monaco meeting (like Arctic Parliamentarians, the EU Arctic Monaco meeting etc.) is strongly encouraged to:

- Support and encourage the Arctic Council and their partners to sustain and increase Arctic observations, and related data and information management services.
- Take concrete actions for ensuring long-term national as well as trans-national funding for observing platforms, data archives, and information management services.
- Assist in filling current gaps (temporal, spatial, and disciplinary) in Arctic observing and data services.