

Young Researcher Report - Open Assembly Panel: International law, “soft laws” and governance on ice: Economic, Cultural and Political Implications.

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Human rights on ice: Professor Guðmundur Alfreðsson

Professor Alfreðsson was very critical towards rich democracies and their human rights performance. He pointed out that often indigenous communities, while being rich in natural resources still have poor living standards. The Arctic states are keen on the idea of exporting human rights and don't hesitate criticizing others, but what they really need to do is to take a close look at themselves. If they would do that they might discover that there are inconsistencies both within the countries and between them. The main point being made is that all the Arctic states have room for improvement regarding indigenous human rights; it is a question of political will.

Our Ice Dependent World – Impacts and Challenges for the Inuit of Nunavik, Arctic Quebec, Canada: Jean-François Arteau

The presentation provided a good overview of Arctic developments in general. The Arctic has become a global hot topic and the non- Arctic states have also been bitten by the “gold search bug”. As the Arctic has gone from being ignored to becoming a center of attention it becomes necessary to include the rights of the indigenous peoples in the equation. In Nunavik there is a population of about 10.000 Inuits, it is a fairly young population and their quality of live is shocking. Human security must be built up to make sure that they will not become a lost generation. The Inuit have always been able to govern themselves, they are building up infrastructure, do have something valuable to contribute and should have self determination.

Regional Constraints on Soft Law Legitimacy: Some Australian Geopolitical Perspectives: Dr. Richard Herr

Dr. Herr shifted the focus point from the North to the South. He emphasized that climate change provides a common purpose to fight a common problem. In the South Pacific it has been a question of mitigation and suffering, adaptation has not been an option. The people in the South Pacific have criticized Australia for securing their own economic interests and produced a double vision. Internationally Australia has different views on climate change than can be detected in its domestic debates. Australia has signed a large number of international agreements, nonetheless there is a huge lack of consistencies and the people of the South Pacific are influenced by the decisions being made. In the meanwhile, questions like “will Australia take climate refugees?” remain unanswered.

Sea Ice Navigation in the Northern Sea Route: Dr. Lasse Pettersson

This last presentation of the panel gave quite a different perspective than the previous ones as it was more related to natural sciences. It demonstrated a strong dependency between weather and climate, both on the short- and long term scale. It showed more dramatic changes in the sea ice melting during summertime reaching an extreme minimum of summertime ice in 2007. But what does that mean? It means that we need improvements when it comes to prediction on what will happen to the ice, and improvement in infrastructure like icebreakers and capabilities in search and rescue combating pollution.

Discussions:

After the presentations Ambassador Halinen pointed out that the Arctic Council could have human rights more on its agenda, however, it is a soft law institution. On the bright side, the AC has reached an agreement on SAR and is working on an agreement on the matter of oil spills and has a working group of sustainable development that could take up the indigenous human rights issues.

Two comments were made, on the one hand Liisa Holmberg brought us back to the issues of the Saami, dealing with the Finnish government and on the other hand Willy Östring raised the questions of legal and political challenges of the new sailing routes.

All in the entire panel and the discussions went very well together with the panel “Humanity, Communities, Minds, Perceptions and Knowledge on Ice” from the previous day, by providing a somewhat different perspective to the indigenous issues that had been brought up by the indigenous representatives.