

Northern Women as International Actors in Circumpolar Science: The Northern Forum Academy

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At the end of the second millennium, the strengthening of the role of women is observed in all fields of human activity including science. This is just as true for developments at the international level as it is for those taking place on national, regional and local levels. This tendency is demonstrated by several examples in northern regions. For instance, the Circumpolar Universities Association, which holds a significant place in the development of circumpolar science and education, is headed by a woman—Outi Snellman. In the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) in north-eastern Russia, as well, women are playing an active role in the scientific community through the non-governmental organization known as the League of Women Scientists of Yakutia (see p. 67, this issue). This agency has played a leading role in advising and working with government on issues that are of great concern to and affect women as well as the scientific community.

One can say with full confidence that women scientists have also played a significant role in the formation and development of the Northern Forum Academy (NFA), an international organization that is beginning to gain more and more authority among the world's scientific community. Until the end of 1997, the Director of the Central Secretariat of the Northern Forum Academy, which was then located at the Arctic Center of the University of Lapland in

Rovaniemi, Finland, was Dr. Ekaterina Balaganskaya. Thanks to her efforts, publication of a newsletter was begun and the Northern Forum Academy's web site was established. Since the time that the Secretariat moved to Yakutsk, Russia, women have made up half of the staff of the Secretariat. The NFA is comprised of more than 200 individual and corporate members, of which twenty-five are women who are leading specialists in diverse scientific fields and are drawn from various regions of the Circumpolar North. The Academy is also gradually developing a network of official regional representatives for various regions, who are drawn from among the Academy's most active members. We would like to note the excellent work of Shauna McLarnon, a consultant and specialist on circumpolar peoples' development, in her work as representative of the Northern Forum Academy for Canada. As well, Maria Polskaya, who is President of the Nordic Fund, is leading multifaceted activities in Saint Petersburg, Russia, and promotes the authority of the Academy in every possible way throughout the European North.

The Yakutsk Secretariat of the NFA coordinates the Sakha interdisciplinary programme on Arctic problems, in which dozens of women generally take part. The NFA also supports their efforts in publishing the results of their research. Within the past two years, the Academy has supported the publication of two separate monographs by female scientists on geology and on radiation safety, as well as publishing numerous articles on various themes by women-scientists in the proceedings of two of the conferences sponsored by the Academy, in various collections of papers and in scientific magazines.

Having considered the importance of increasing the role of women in the development of northern regions, the NFA immediately supported the initiative of holding the Circumpolar Women's Conference. The Academy lent support to the organization of the conference during the original recruitment period and promotional tour of Ms. McLarnon through Siberia and the Russian Far East,

as well as playing a significant role in advertising the conference, the recruitment of potential participants from Russia's northern regions, and logistics concerning the travel and other arrangements for Russian delegates to and from the conference in Whitehorse. The fact that over thirty women from Russia, many of whom are scientists or work closely with scientists or within scientific institutions, attended the conference is attestation to a) the importance of such an initiative as the Circumpolar Women's Conference to women of the Circumpolar North, including those from Russia; b) the importance attached to meeting women and sharing experiences with women from other circumpolar regions and countries; c) the fact that such an initiative, among other circumpolar initiatives aimed at establishing and/or promoting various networking mechanisms between representatives of circumpolar regions, was achieved with the support of agencies and individuals from a number of regions and countries; d) the active role that women can and are choosing to play in the sphere of circumpolar science; and e) the contribution to the development of northern women that can and is being played by such institutions as the Northern Forum Academy.

Whether approached as scientists or as individuals whose experience and knowledge should be respected by scholars and other specialists working in the sphere of northern and/or circumpolar development, including that of particular regions or segments of the population (e.g., ethnic groups, women), there is a growing tendency among northern women to ensure that their voices are heard and to contribute to positive growth within the circumpolar community. This is demonstrated by the active role that delegates from Russia have played during this 1999 Circumpolar Women's Conference in Whitehorse, and by the suggestion and subsequent investigation of the possibility of the next Circumpolar Women's Conference being held in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia). If possible, this would allow many of the region's women, who were

otherwise prevented from attending the conference in Canada due to financial constraints, to be actively involved in such a learning experience. So too would it be a wonderful opportunity for women from throughout the circumpolar community to not only gather once again, but also to acquaint themselves with a unique learning opportunity afforded to them in the northeastern region of Siberia, Russia. Such an experience would truly demonstrate the meeting of East and West in celebration of our new circumpolar community.

All these examples clearly demonstrate that more and more organizations, and particularly international organizations, are being established with the understanding that the active involvement of women in the activities of those organizations enhances not only the efficiency of the work, but also allows the organizations to enhance their activities by including a spectrum of trends and to introduce new approaches to solving the very real problems that face Arctic and northern regions and peoples.

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