

Canada pushes development as it takes over Arctic Council

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Canadian Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq (R) and Canadian Minister of State Alice Wong (L) speak on October 14, 2011 in Vancouver. Canada said Wednesday it will promote unprecedented industrial development in the far north as it takes over the helm of the Arctic Council, while activists called for a ban on oil drilling.

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Leona Aglukkaq, minister for northern affairs, told a teleconference from Sweden: "With the help of our Arctic Council partners, we will focus on creating economic development and sustainable northern communities."

It is a priority embraced by all Arctic Council members, she said, adding that it must be done in an "environmentally sustainable manner."

The intergovernmental forum—composed of Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States—aims to promote cooperation on environmental protection, [oil](#) and mineral exploitation, shipping, tourism and fishing.

At a biennial gathering, which took place in the town of Kiruna, Sweden, Canada took over the rotating two-year chairmanship of the group, which is at a crossroads.

Rising temperatures have boosted international interest in the polar region, as [melting ice](#) opens up [shipping routes](#) and makes hitherto inaccessible mineral resources easier to exploit.

Global warming is happening twice as fast in the Arctic than elsewhere on the planet, and many fear not only devastating impacts of warming but also from an influx of people and industry on the pristine environment, wildlife and Inuit culture.

Aglukkaq's declaration came as Greenpeace protested outside Canada's parliament to press Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government to ban [oil and gas drilling](#) in the Arctic, which is believed to be rich in hydrocarbons.

The activist group also called for an uninhabited area around the North Pole to be declared a sanctuary, to be protected from large-scale

industrial development, such as oil drilling and industrial fishing.

"We will not stand by and let the Harper government use the next two years to advance its destructive industrial agenda at the Arctic Council," said Greenpeace's Christy Ferguson.

"The Arctic Council should be a forum for preventing environmental disasters like oil spills and fighting climate change—not facilitating them."

Aglukkaq countered that northern residents "want development."

The minister noted that mines or other industrial projects must be approved "largely by aboriginal peoples" as part of land claims agreements with the Canadian government.

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