

Before coming to The Fletcher School, I had never heard of the Arctic Circle Assembly. I have long been interested in issues regarding the Arctic, especially as they relate to climate change and the environment, but never felt like I had a good framework to explore these interests. As a first year MALD, I was eager to have the opportunity to participate in what has been one of the most enriching experiences I've had at Fletcher thus far.

The Arctic Circle Assembly is the largest annual international gathering to discuss the Arctic, and is held every October in Reykjavik, Iceland. With over 2,000 individuals in attendance from over 60 countries, topics range from security, geopolitics, and indigenous representation to climate change, technological advancement, and maritime affairs. Not only did the conference bring together politicians, academics, researchers, and businesspeople from around the world, but it also encouraged students and young professionals to attend and share their research. As a student focused on environmental policy and technology, I was keen to attend sessions that focused how climate change is transforming the Arctic region.

One of the first sessions I attended was "Climate Justice, Permafrost Thaw, and Community-Based Observations," which called attention to how the changing environment has impacted the health and livelihoods of Arctic communities and indigenous peoples. Speakers discussed how scientists and indigenous peoples can collaborate more successfully to the benefit of all, and highlighted indigenous knowledge as a key piece in creating effective solutions. In general, I really appreciated how strong the level of indigenous representation was at the conference. We had the opportunity to hear from a range of voices, including indigenous students from Canada, the International Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, and several members of the Saami Parliament. For example, during one session called "Critical Minerals in the Arctic – Responsible, Sustainable, Equitable?", multiple Saami audience members questioned one of the speakers, Øystein Rushfeldt, the CEO of Norwegian mining company, Nussir ASA, on the ethics of continuing projects that do not have the explicit consent of local indigenous communities. It's clear that there are strong differences in attitudes between those from indigenous communities and those from Western nations, and representation at these global forums is extremely important to continue constructive dialogue.

I also had the chance to attend sessions such as "Off-Shore Wind Energy in the North Atlantic," and "Energy Generation and Transition in the Arctic." I learned how wind energy deployment can play a role in accelerating a just and carbon neutral transition. With companies from the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Scotland, a leader in the offshore wind industry, we had a chance to get a pan-Nordic perspective. I also heard from experts on the challenges of transitioning the transportation industry, especially aviation and shipping, with the pros and cons of electrification, biofuels, and e-fuels discussed in detail.

I was fortunate to attend not only conference sessions, but also meetings which were arranged by Professor Rockford Weitz, Professor of Maritime Affairs at The Fletcher School. The day before the conference, we had the opportunity to meet Icelandic entrepreneur Thor Sigfusson and visit the Iceland Ocean Cluster, a network that facilitates cross-collaboration in the marine industry. It was fascinating to learn about one of Iceland Ocean Cluster's projects, "100% Fish."

This project is focused on assisting the seafood industry in utilizing more of each fish, which not only increases the value of each fish caught, but also increases new business opportunities and decreases waste. Thanks to technological advancement, there are now a range of products made from different parts of fish, maximizing sustainable growth in the Arctic blue economy. On our final day, we also met with Halla Logadottir, a Fletcher alum and the Director-General of Iceland's National Energy Authority. She gave a presentation on Iceland's path to a 100% renewable energy future and how her country has effectively transitioned from fossil fuel to geothermal energy. It was fascinating to hear her perspective on the transition to renewable energy, and I'm excited to hear from her again when she's next in Boston, where she teaches as an adjunct professor and the co-founder of the Harvard Kennedy School Arctic Initiative.

Overall, this experience confirmed my interest in issues surrounding climate change, and thanks to the generosity of CIERP and the encouragement of Professor Weitz, I'm excited to delve more into the green transition and topics such as the use of critical minerals and offshore wind power.

-Kristen Weller

