

## Reflection Piece: Arctic Circle Assembly October 2023

*My deepest appreciation to CIERP for funding an unforgettable experience.*



Attending the Arctic Circle Assembly is certainly one of my highlights while at Fletcher. It is an annual assembly that takes place in Reykjavík, Iceland. This year there were over 2,200 participants from 72 countries.

Prior to Fletcher, the Arctic was not on my radar of areas of interest or of importance. During my first semester I had the privilege of sitting in on a few of Professor Weitz maritime classes, which opened my eyes to the critical importance of the Arctic region....How I have managed to get this far along in my academic and personal career without this realization was a bit of a personal burden to work through. Yet, throughout my time at Fletcher I've come to realize the benefits of not confining my expertise to one possibly two regions of focus. There is great value in having a larger understanding of regional players and their dynamics on the global stage. Instead, I've chosen to focus on the intersections of my two fields of study: environmental resource policy and human security. Rather than isolating topics as "regional," an intersectional approach would provide a lens to see how concerns in the Arctic align/influence (or not) with environmental issues on a smaller scales. This perspective is one of the reason's I was interested in attending the Arctic Circle.

Another reason is my interest in energy security. There were over 200 sessions at Arctic Assembly and among them were a good variety of panels on energy. Below are some of the panels I attended.

- Small Modular Nuclear Reactors in the Arctic - Has their Time Come?
- Reducing Barrier to Critical Minerals Development in the Arctic
- Remote Sensing for Climate Change Studies in the Arctic
- Next Generation Nuclear Power in the Arctic: Possibilities and Concerns
- Thorium MSR Energy: Is the Revolution Coming?
- Accelerating Deployment of Renewable Energy with Rural Northern and Arctic Communities
- Nuclear Energy and Energy Transition
- Digital Environments and Indigenous Languages in the Arctic

I found that creating a space for cross sector engagement was one of the best parts of the Arctic Circle Assembly. This may be a "hot take" but I think nuclear energy needs to be discussed and heavily considered as a possible solution for replacing coal and natural gas plants in terms of providing base load energy. I found it refreshing to meet and engage with others at the conference who not only shared similar opinions, but also had unique ideas.

## Boiling it Down: Key Takeaways

These are *some* of the main takeaways from attending the Arctic Circle Assembly.

- 1.) The survival of the Arctic environment and their peoples way of life depends on global cooperation. This isn't Las Vegas, what happens in the Arctic does not stay in the Arctic. Climate change is a wicked problem that involves global effort. Therefore, policies and conversations around protecting environments and Indigenous ways of life, rely on global awareness and action.
- 2.) Nuclear energy should no longer be the black sheep of the energy generation family. If we are serious about tackling climate change, we should be serious about nuclear and how it can help address climate change.
- 3.) It's important to have fun! Each night of the conference there were networking events or film screenings. I enjoyed the opportunity to engage with other attendees and panelists outside of the conference setting. It was also important because it created a more relaxed, down to earth setting to get to know others on a more personal level. Along these lines, some of us had the opportunity to explore a little of Iceland. The relationships I developed are in part, founded on shared experiential learning. Traveling with colleagues to attend a conference and explore a new place that is of shared interest in some way is irreplaceable. This was one of the most valuable aspects for me in that it created another community within the wider Fletcher community.

One of the groups at the Arctic Circle Assembly was The Mamos, an Indigenous group from Colombia. They came bearing a message that touches on key takeaway one and is the concluding note I would like to leave you with. The woman in the left side of the photo is the translator and the below transcription is based on her translation.



***“We are guardians of this life, all of us on earth.” “So because this seed that is supposed to be green and flourishing is quite dry on earth now. We have come with an instruction and with an invitation also for all of you in your own territories take care of this seed of life to take care of the environment so this ring of life can be protecting what is flourishing on the earth and these 9 flowers of life can be able to give the beauty on this earth will require all of you to take care of your territories.”***

-The Mamos Indigenous Peoples of the Sierra Nevada De Santa Marta, Colombia

