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In October 2024, I was very fortunate to have received funding from CIERP (Fletcher's Center for International Environmental and Resource Policy) and FEEF (the Fletcher Educational Enrichment Fund) to travel to Reykjavik, Iceland, for the 2024 Arctic Circle Assembly. Upon receiving word that I had been awarded funding to help cover travel expenses, I was overjoyed: the opportunity to travel to this conference with a group from Fletcher was a major factor in my decision to enroll in the MALD program, and to have been given the opportunity to do so after having been in the program a little over a month, reinforced (to me) that I had made the correct decision.

The funding I received was integral in my decision to attend the conference. As a graduate student with little in the way of savings, I would not have been able to travel to Reykjavik, where I was able to be immersed firsthand into the issues with which I had begun to gain familiarity in my previous work at the Pentagon, prior to enrolling at Fletcher.

Upon arriving at Fletcher, and learning about the way funding for educational enrichment works here, I applied for—and received—funding to attend the Arctic Circle Assembly. In doing so, I was afforded the opportunity to learn about the geopolitical and security aspects of the Arctic landscape in the face of climate change, in addition to economic aspects, and to perceive the intersection of all of these, through the perspective of those indigenous to the region.

The panels I was able to attend and the people with whom I was fortunate to speak about these issues offered more knowledge and insight than would have been possible from solely reading. I learned of the type of work being done—especially pertaining to security—and what types of careers I could aspire towards at the intersection of security and climate change in the Arctic, as an American. Panels that stood out to me were ones on geopolitics, and security strategies and implications in the Arctic region in the coming years. Additionally, I found the session on energy and infrastructure resilience in Nordic countries fascinating, especially given the importance of reinforcing such infrastructure in the face of changing conditions in the region, due to climate change.

Attending the Arctic Circle Assembly seems to be the best way to have accomplished my goals of learning of the types of developments taking place, and careers available, within and pertaining to the Arctic region, as I was able to be in a space with those whose interests and careers overlap with my interests and aspirations. It gave me the space and context in which to ask others about their interests and career paths, as well as to absorb their every morsel of advice. It also gave me the opportunity and excuse to become friends with fellow Fletcher students whom I might not have otherwise, in a context that allowed existing bonds to strengthen. As a first-year student still getting my bearings, I was especially grateful for this unexpected benefit.

In short, attending the Arctic Circle Assembly, made possible by the funding received from CIERP and FEEF provided me with hope and a renewed sense of purpose to which I would not have otherwise been privy. For that, I extremely grateful.