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BEIJING — The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China published a white paper titled "China's Arctic Policy" on Jan 26.

Following is the full text of the white paper:

China's Arctic Policy

The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China

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sea passages, and natural resources. The Arctic situation now goes beyond its original inter-Arctic States or regional nature, having a vital bearing on the interests of States outside the region and the interests of the international community as a whole, as well as on the survival, the development, and the shared future for mankind. It is an issue with global implications and international impacts.

A champion for the development of a community with a shared future for mankind, China is an active participant, builder and contributor in Arctic affairs who has spared no efforts to contribute its wisdom to the development of the Arctic region. The Chinese government hereby issues this white paper, to expound its basic positions on Arctic affairs, to elaborate on its policy goals, basic principles and major policies and positions regarding its engagement in Arctic affairs, to guide relevant Chinese government departments and institutions in Arctic-related activities and cooperation, to encourage relevant parties to get better involved in Arctic governance, and to work with the international community to safeguard and promote peace and stability in, and the sustainable development of, the Arctic.

I. The Arctic Situation and Recent Changes

The Arctic is situated at a special geographical location. It commonly refers to the area of land and sea north of the Arctic Circle (approximately 66 degrees 34 minutes N), totaling about 21 million square kilometers. In the context of international law, the Arctic includes the northernmost landmasses of Europe, Asia and North America adjacent to the Arctic Ocean and the relevant islands, and a combination of sea areas within national jurisdiction, high seas, and the Area in the Arctic Ocean. There is no single comprehensive treaty for all Arctic affairs. The Charter of the United Nations, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Spitsbergen Treaty and other treaties and general international law govern Arctic affairs at present.

The continental and insular land territories in the Arctic cover an area of about 8 million square kilometers, with sovereignty over them belonging to Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States, respectively. The Arctic Ocean covers an area of more than 12 million square kilometers, in which coastal States and other States share maritime rights and interests in accordance with international law. These coastal States have within their jurisdiction internal waters, territorial seas, contiguous zones, exclusive economic zones, and continental shelves in the Arctic Ocean. Certain areas of the Arctic Ocean form part of the high seas and the Area.

States from outside the Arctic region do not have territorial sovereignty in the Arctic, but they do have rights in respect of scientific research, navigation, overflight, fishing, laying of submarine cables and pipelines in the high seas and other relevant sea areas in the Arctic Ocean, and rights to resource exploration and exploitation in the Area, pursuant to treaties such as UNCLOS and general international law. In addition, Contracting Parties to the Spitsbergen Treaty enjoy the liberty of access and entry to certain areas of the Arctic, the right under conditions of equality and, in accordance with law, to the exercise and practice of scientific research, production and commercial activities such as hunting, fishing, and mining in these areas.

The Arctic boasts a unique natural environment and rich resources, with most of its sea area covered under thick ice for most of the year. The Arctic natural environment is now undergoing rapid changes. Over the past three decades, temperature has been rising continuously in the Arctic, resulting in

for the commercial use of sea routes and development of resources in the region. Commercial activities in the region will have considerable impact on global shipping, international trade and energy supply, bring about major social and economic changes, and exert important influence on the way of work and life of Arctic residents including the indigenous peoples. They may also pose a potential threat to the ecological environment of the Arctic. The international community faces the same threat and shares the same future in addressing global issues concerning the Arctic.

II. China and the Arctic

China is an important stakeholder in Arctic affairs. Geographically, China is a "Near-Arctic State", one of the continental States that are closest to the Arctic Circle. The natural conditions of the Arctic and their changes have a direct impact on China's climate system and ecological environment, and, in turn, on its economic interests in agriculture, forestry, fishery, marine industry and other sectors.

China is also closely involved in the trans-regional and global issues in the Arctic, especially in such areas as climate change, environment, scientific research, utilization of shipping routes, resource exploration and exploitation, security, and global governance. These issues are vital to the existence and development of all countries and humanity, and directly affect the interests of non-Arctic States including China. China enjoys the freedom or rights of scientific research, navigation, overflight, fishing, laying of submarine cables and pipelines, and resource exploration and exploitation in the high seas, the Area and other relevant sea areas, and certain special areas in the Arctic Ocean, as stipulated in treaties such as the UNCLOS and the Spitsbergen Treaty and general international law. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China shoulders the important mission of jointly promoting peace and security in the Arctic. The utilization of sea routes and exploration and development of the resources in the Arctic may have a huge impact on the energy strategy and economic development of China, which is a major trading nation and energy consumer in the world. China's capital, technology, market, knowledge and experience is expected to play a major role in expanding the network of shipping routes in the Arctic and facilitating the economic and social progress of the coastal States along the routes. China has shared interests with Arctic States and a shared future with the rest of the world in the Arctic.

China has long been involved in Arctic affairs. In 1925, China joined the Spitsbergen Treaty and started to participate in addressing the Arctic affairs. Since then, China

States in this region, respect the tradition and culture of the indigenous peoples, as well as respect the rights and freedom of non-Arctic States to carry out activities in this region in accordance with the law, and respect the overall interests of the international community in the Arctic.

“Cooperation” is an effective means for China’s participation in Arctic affairs. It means establishing a relationship of multi-level, omni-dimensional and wide-ranging cooperation in this area. Through global, regional, multilateral and bilateral channels, all stakeholders — including States from both inside and outside the Arctic, intergovernmental organizations, and nonstate entities — are encouraged to take part in cooperation on climate change, scientific research, environmental protection, shipping route development, resource utilization and cultural activities.

“Win-win result” is the value pursuit of China’s participation in Arctic affairs. It means all stakeholders in this area should pursue mutual benefit and common progress in all fields of activities. Such cooperation should ensure that the benefits are shared by both Arctic and non-Arctic States as well as by nonstate entities, and should accommodate the interests of local residents including the indigenous peoples. It should also help to promote coordinated development of activities in all fields to ensure the harmony between natural conservation and social development.

“Sustainability” is the fundamental goal of China’s participation in Arctic affairs. This means promoting the sustainable development of the Arctic by ensuring the sustainability of environmental protection, resource utilization and human activities in the area. It means realizing harmonious coexistence between man and nature, better coordination between ecological protection, economic growth and social progress, better balance between utilization, management and protection, and intergenerational equity.

IV. China’s Policies and Positions on Participating in Arctic Affairs

When participating in Arctic affairs, China prioritizes scientific research, underscores the importance of environmental protection, rational utilization, law-based governance and international cooperation, and commits itself to maintaining a peaceful, secure and stable Arctic order.

1. Deepening the exploration and understanding of the Arctic

The Arctic holds great value for scientific research. To explore and understand the Arctic serves as the priority and focus for China in its Arctic activities.

China actively promotes scientific expedition and research in the Arctic. China respects the Arctic States’ exclusive jurisdiction over research activities under their national jurisdiction, maintains that scientific research in areas under the jurisdiction of Arctic States should be carried out through cooperation in accordance with the law, and stresses that all States have the freedom of scientific research on the high seas of the Arctic Ocean. China is actively involved in multi-disciplinary research including Arctic geology, geography, ice and snow, hydrology, meteorology, sea ice, biology, ecology, geophysics and marine chemistry. It actively participates in monitoring and assessing local climatic and environmental changes, and carries out multi-level and multi-domain continuous observation of atmosphere, sea, sea ice, glaciers, soil, bio-ecological character and environmental quality through the establishment of multi-element Arctic observation system, construction of cooperative research (observation) stations, and development of and participation in the Arctic observation network. China is committed to improving its capacity in Arctic expedition and research, strengthening the construction, maintenance and functions of research stations, vessels and other supporting platforms in the Arctic, and promoting the building of icebreakers for scientific purposes.

China supports and encourages research activities in the Arctic by constantly

increasing investment in scientific research, building modernized research platforms, and improving the capacity in, and level of, research on the Arctic. It is making a greater effort to advance research in the fields of natural science, climate change and ecological environment, accelerate the development of basic subjects such as physics, chemistry, life science and earth science, strengthen social science

activities, strengthens protection of migratory birds and their habitats, organizes research on the migration patterns of Arctic migratory birds, improves the adaptability and resilience of the Arctic ecological system, and advances international cooperation in the protection of Arctic species of fauna and flora.

(3) Addressing climate change

Addressing climate change in the Arctic is an important part of global climate governance. China consistently takes the issue of climate change seriously. It has included measures to deal with climate change such as Nationally Determined Contributions in its overall national development agenda and planning, and has made significant contributions to the conclusion of the Paris Agreement. China's emission reduction measures have a positive impact on the climatic and ecological environment of the Arctic. China is committed to studying the substance and energy exchange process and mechanisms of the Arctic, evaluating the interaction between the Arctic and global climate change, predicting potential risks posed by future climate change to the Arctic's natural resources and ecological environment, and advancing Arctic cryospheric sciences. It strengthens publicity and education on addressing climate change to raise the public's awareness of the issue, and promotes international cooperation in addressing climate change in the Arctic.

3. Utilizing Arctic Resources in a Lawful and Rational Manner

The Arctic has abundant resources, but a fragile ecosystem. China advocates protection and rational use of the region and encourages its enterprises to engage in international cooperation on the exploration for and utilization of Arctic resources by making the best use of their advantages in capital, technology and domestic market. China maintains that all activities to explore and utilize the Arctic should abide by treaties such as the UNCLOS and the Spitsbergen Treaty as well as general international law, respect the laws of the Arctic States, and proceed in a sustainable way on the condition of properly protecting the eco-environment of the Arctic and

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4. Participating Actively in Arctic governance and international cooperation

China is committed to improving and complementing the Arctic governance regime. China has worked to regulate and supervise the activities of Chinese citizens, legal persons or other organizations in the Arctic in accordance with the law to ensure that their activities accord with international law and respect the relevant national laws on environmental protection, resource conservation, and sustainable development. And it has endeavored to strengthen overall coordination of its Arctic policy and related affairs. Furthermore, China takes an active part in the international governance of the Arctic. China upholds the current Arctic governance system with the UN Charter and the UNCLOS as its core, plays a constructive part in the making, interpretation, application and development of international rules regarding the Arctic, and safeguards the common interests of all nations and the international community.

China stands for steadily advancing international cooperation on the Arctic. It has worked to strengthen such cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative according to the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits and emphasized policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and closer people-to-people ties. Concrete cooperation steps include coordinating development strategies with the Arctic States, encouraging joint efforts to build a blue economic passage linking China and Europe via the Arctic Ocean, enhancing Arctic digital connectivity, and building a global infrastructure network. China hopes to work for the common good of all parties and further common interests through the Arctic.

At the global level, China actively participates in the formulation of rules concerning the global environment, climate change, international maritime issues, and high seas fisheries management, and fulfills all its international obligations in accordance with the law. China expands cooperation with various States and international organizations in environmental protection, and promotes energy conservation, emissions reduction, and low-carbon development. China also promotes global cooperation in tackling climate change, and upholds the principles of equity, common but differentiated responsibilities, and respective capabilities. It urges developed countries to fulfill their commitments under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement, and provides support to fellow developing countries in addressing climate change. China plays a constructive role in the work of the International Maritime Organization, and makes solid efforts to fulfill its international responsibilities.

Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic, and the Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation, all adopted by the Arctic Council. China also supports international cooperation through such platforms as the Arctic Science Ministerial Meeting.

At the bilateral and multilateral levels, China promotes practical cooperation in all fields, especially regarding climate change, scientific expeditions, environmental protection, ecosystems, shipping routes, resource development, submarine fiber-optic cables, cultural exchanges, and capacity building. China proposes to form cooperative partnerships between Arctic and non-Arctic States, and has carried out bilateral consultations on Arctic affairs with all Arctic States. In 2010, China and the United States set up an annual dialogue mechanism for bilateral dialogues on the law of the sea and polar issues. Since 2013, China and Russia have been conducting dialogues on Arctic issues. In 2012, China and Iceland signed the Framework Agreement on Arctic Cooperation, which was the first intergovernmental agreement on Arctic issues between China and an Arctic State. China also values cooperation with other non-Arctic States. It has conducted bilateral dialogues on the law of the sea and polar issues with the United Kingdom and France. In 2016, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea launched high-level trilateral dialogues on Arctic issues to promote exchanges on policies, practices, and experience regarding Arctic international cooperation, scientific research, and commercial cooperation.

China supports the participation of all Arctic stakeholders in Arctic governance and international cooperation. China supports platforms such as "The Arctic: Territory of Dialogue", "The Arctic Circle", "Arctic Frontiers", "The China-Nordic Arctic Research Center", in promoting exchanges and cooperation among the stakeholders. China also supports the participation of research institutions and enterprises in Arctic governance with their own expertise put to good use. China encourages research institutions to communicate with foreign think tanks and academic institutions, and supports enterprises to participate in the commercial development and utilization of the Arctic in a lawful and orderly manner.

5. Promoting peace and stability in the Arctic

Peace and stability in the Arctic provides a significant guarantee for all activities in the region, and serves the fundamental interest of all countries including China. China calls for the peaceful utilization of the Arctic and commits itself to maintaining peace and stability, protecting lives and property, and ensuring the security of maritime trade, operations and transport in the region. China supports the peaceful settlement of disputes over territory and maritime rights and interests by all parties concerned in accordance with such treaties as the UN Charter and the UNCLOS and general international law, and supports efforts to safeguard security and stability in the region. China strives to reinforce cooperation with the Arctic States in maritime and air search and rescue, maritime early warning, emergency response, and information sharing in order to properly handle security challenges such as maritime accidents, environmental pollution, and maritime crimes.

Conclusion

The future of the Arctic concerns the interests of the Arctic States, the wellbeing of non-Arctic States and that of the humanity as a whole. The governance of the Arctic requires the participation and contribution of all stakeholders. On the basis of the principles of "respect, cooperation, win-win result and sustainability", China, as a responsible major country, is ready to cooperate with all relevant parties to seize the historic opportunity in the development of the Arctic, to address the challenges brought by the changes in the region, jointly understand, protect, develop and participate in the governance of the Arctic, and advance Arctic-related cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, so as to build a community with a shared future for mankind and contribute to peace, stability and sustainable development in the Arctic.

