



*SharkMUN* | June 12<sup>th</sup> – June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2026

## **ADDRESSING EMERGING CRIMINAL ACTIVITY IN THE ARCTIC REGION**

Welcome delegates to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) of SharkMUN 2026.

In this committee, delegates will examine the growing challenge of transnational crime in the Arctic region. As climate change accelerates ice melt and opens previously inaccessible maritime routes, economic opportunities in shipping, fishing, tourism, and natural resource extraction have expanded significantly. However, increased accessibility has also created opportunities for criminal organizations to exploit weak governance, limited law enforcement capacity, and vast unmonitored territories.

Delegates must address emerging threats, including illegal fishing, environmental crimes, trafficking, smuggling, cybercrime, and illicit resource extraction. The committee will explore how international cooperation, law enforcement coordination, and criminal justice mechanisms can strengthen security and prevent criminal activity in one of the world's most strategically important regions.

### **Introduction**

The Arctic has traditionally been protected from large-scale criminal activity due to its harsh climate, limited population, and difficult accessibility. However, rising global temperatures have dramatically transformed the region.

According to scientific studies, Arctic sea ice has declined significantly over recent decades, opening new maritime routes such as the Northern Sea Route and increasing commercial activity across the region. As economic opportunities grow, so do opportunities for criminal exploitation.

The Arctic's vast geography and limited law enforcement presence make it particularly vulnerable to transnational organized crime. Illegal fishing operations exploit valuable marine resources, while



environmental crimes threaten fragile ecosystems. Smuggling networks may use emerging shipping routes to transport illicit goods, including drugs, weapons, and trafficked persons.

The region also faces growing concerns regarding cybercrime targeting critical infrastructure, energy facilities, transportation networks, and communications systems. Increased geopolitical competition further complicates efforts to strengthen criminal justice cooperation.

As Arctic development continues, the international community faces the challenge of balancing economic growth, environmental protection, indigenous rights, and crime prevention.

## Timeline of Key Events

| Year | Event                                                                                |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1982 | UNCLOS was adopted, establishing maritime jurisdiction relevant to Arctic waters     |
| 1996 | Arctic Council established                                                           |
| 2000 | UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) adopted                  |
| 2007 | Russia plants flag on North Pole seabed; Arctic competition intensifies.             |
| 2015 | Arctic sea ice reaches record low; Northern Sea Route opens for extended seasons.    |
| 2018 | UNODC identifies the Arctic as an emerging hotspot for transnational crime           |
| 2020 | Illegal fishing incidents have increased significantly in the Arctic high seas.      |
| 2022 | Arctic Council pauses cooperation following geopolitical tensions.                   |
| 2024 | First Arctic-wide cybercrime report documents attacks on energy infrastructure.      |
| 2025 | Arctic coastal states report record seizures of illicit goods along shipping routes. |



## **Key terms**

### **Transnational Organized Crime**

Criminal activity conducted across national borders by organized groups seeking financial or political gain.

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### **Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing**

Fishing activities conducted in violation of national or international regulations.

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### **Environmental Crime**

Illegal activities that directly harm ecosystems, wildlife, or natural resources.

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### **Arctic Shipping Routes**

Maritime routes becoming increasingly accessible due to declining sea ice.

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### **Human Trafficking**

The recruitment, transportation, or exploitation of individuals through force, coercion, or deception.



## **Current situation**

The Arctic is undergoing rapid transformation due to climate change. As ice coverage decreases, economic activity has expanded considerably, including commercial shipping, tourism, fisheries, and resource extraction.

This increased activity has created opportunities for criminal networks. Illegal fishing represents one of the most significant challenges, as Arctic fisheries become increasingly accessible and valuable. Weak enforcement capabilities make detection and prosecution difficult.

Environmental crime is another growing concern. Illegal extraction of natural resources, pollution violations, and wildlife trafficking threaten some of the world's most fragile ecosystems.

The Arctic's geographic isolation also creates vulnerabilities for smuggling operations. Criminal organizations may exploit limited border controls and surveillance gaps to transport illicit goods through emerging maritime corridors.

Cybersecurity risks are likewise increasing. Energy infrastructure, transportation systems, and communications networks in Arctic states are becoming more interconnected and vulnerable to cyberattacks conducted by criminal groups.

The challenge is compounded by overlapping jurisdictions, limited international enforcement mechanisms, and differing national interests among Arctic states.



## Main Countries Involved

### Canada

Maintains extensive Arctic territory and faces challenges regarding maritime security, environmental protection, and indigenous governance.



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### Russia

Controls the largest Arctic coastline and oversees major shipping routes and resource extraction projects.



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### United States

Participates in Arctic governance through Alaska and focuses on maritime security and law enforcement cooperation.



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### Norway

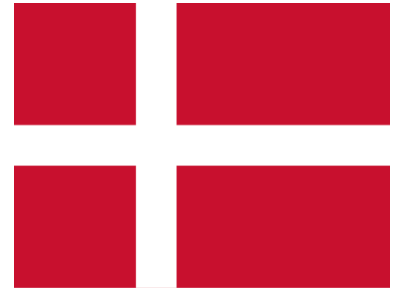
A leader in Arctic governance, fisheries management, and maritime enforcement.





## Denmark

Responsible for Arctic affairs through Greenland and actively involved in Arctic cooperation frameworks.



## Additional Stakeholder Positions

| Country/Entity                                                             | Position on Arctic Crime                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Iceland</b>                                                             | Strong advocate for Arctic fisheries enforcement; supports UN-led crime prevention frameworks          |
| <b>Finland</b>                                                             | Focuses on cybercrime and critical infrastructure protection; chairs Arctic Council (2024–2026)        |
| <b>Sweden</b>                                                              | Supports enhanced coast guard cooperation; emphasizes indigenous rights in crime prevention            |
| <b>China</b>                                                               | Self-declared "near-Arctic state"; seeks observer status and economic access; cautious on enforcement. |
| <b>European Union</b>                                                      | Interested in Arctic shipping security; supports UNTOC implementation; opposes criminal exploitation   |
| <b>Indigenous Permanent Participants (e.g., Inuit Circumpolar Council)</b> | Call for community-based monitoring; seek inclusion in crime prevention planning                       |
| <b>INTERPOL</b>                                                            | Operates Arctic crime intelligence unit; facilitates cross-border police cooperation                   |
| <b>UNODC</b>                                                               | Provides technical assistance on UNTOC; gathers data on emerging Arctic crime patterns.                |



## **Previous Attempts to Address the Problem**

Several international mechanisms address Arctic governance and security.

The Arctic Council promotes cooperation among Arctic states regarding environmental protection and sustainable development, though it does not directly address military or criminal enforcement.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime supports international cooperation against transnational organized crime through the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC).

Arctic states have also expanded coast guard cooperation, intelligence sharing, and maritime surveillance initiatives to combat illegal activities.

## **Possible Solutions**

- Strengthening international law enforcement cooperation in Arctic waters.
- Expanding maritime surveillance and monitoring technologies.
- Enhancing intelligence sharing among Arctic and non-Arctic states.
- Combating illegal fishing through stronger inspection and enforcement mechanisms.
- Increasing protection against cybercrime targeting Arctic infrastructure.
- Improving implementation of UNTOC and related international agreements.
- Supporting indigenous communities as partners in monitoring and reporting criminal activity.
- Developing specialized Arctic crime prevention frameworks under UN supervision.



## Guiding Questions for Delegates

1. How can CCPCJ address the jurisdictional gaps that criminal organizations exploit in Arctic waters?
2. Should non-Arctic states with economic interests in the region contribute to law enforcement capacity-building?
3. How can indigenous communities be empowered as active participants in crime prevention without placing undue burden on them?
4. What role should the Arctic Council play in supporting CCPCJ's criminal justice mandate?
5. How can cybercrime targeting Arctic critical infrastructure be prevented when many systems are privately owned and operated?
6. Should illegal fishing in Arctic high seas be explicitly classified as transnational organized crime under UNTOC?
7. How can Arctic states balance national security interests with the need for transparent, multilateral law enforcement cooperation?
8. What mechanisms can ensure that increased Arctic shipping does not become a new corridor for drug and weapons trafficking?





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