



PACIFIC COUNCIL ON
INTERNATIONAL POLICY

DELEGATION PROGRAM

INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION: Norway & Finland

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TRIP OVERVIEW

In May 2023 the Pacific Council on International Policy organized a delegation of 18 Council members to visit Norway and Finland. The focal points of the visit included: NATO, Arctic security, green economy transition, refugee policy, international development, and possible areas of collaboration between these key Nordic countries and California.

The delegation began in Oslo with a day focused on cultural immersion and deepening delegates' understanding of Norwegian culture and history. This was followed by two days of meetings in Oslo including a briefing at the U.S. Embassy with key members of the economic, defense, and political teams. Delegates also met with the leadership of the Norwegian Nobel Institute, met President Masud Gharahkhani who is the leader of Norway's Parliament (the Storting), and met with the leadership of the Norwegian Refugee Council as well as with the Minister of International Development Anne Beathe Tvinnereim.





Following two and a half days in Oslo, the delegation was engaged in two days of intensive and substantive engagements in Helsinki, Finland including a briefing at the U.S. Embassy by Ambassador Douglas Hickey, a meeting hosted by Minister Antti Kaikkonen, the Finnish Minister of Defense, a meeting with the Finnish Innovation Fund (SITRA), and a conversation with the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) on its policy work. Delegates were also welcomed by the leadership of the Finnish Confederation of Industry to help deepen our understanding of global Finnish business priorities. The trip concluded in Helsinki with a briefing at the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs led by Ambassador Mikael Antell, Deputy Director General of the Political Department.

MEETING REPORT

In Oslo, the delegation began its visit with a briefing by Ms. Sharon Hudson-Dean, Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy, and the members of the Embassy's country team. Three principal areas that drive the bilateral relationship between Norway and the U.S. were emphasized. First, the deep commitment of both countries to democracy and human rights. Second, the joint interest of both countries in the Arctic. Finally, the importance of defense cooperation between Norway and the U.S., with Norway's valued status as a founding member of NATO and its recent commitment to a 5-year aid package to Ukraine, extending aid beyond the current Parliament term to ensure stability.



The delegation also met with Secretary General Jan Egeland of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). He provided an overview of the [NRC's unique three-pronged approach](#) to refugee support and assistance, which includes humanitarian

assistance, advocacy, and expert deployment. Notably, the NRC's work reaches 103 million forcibly displaced people worldwide and 53.2 million internally displaced people. It was emphasized that approximately 1 out of every 10 refugees has been directly helped by the NRC. The delegation learned about the NRC's presence in over 40 countries across the Americas, Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and specifically discussed the critical role played by over 500 female staff still operating in Afghanistan, reaching women-led households.

During their time in Oslo, delegates also met with Olav Njølstad, the Director of the Norwegian Nobel Peace Prize Institute, who sits on the 5-member Nobel Committee responsible for awarding the Peace Prize.



A meeting at the Norwegian Parliament (the Storting) provided delegates with unique insights into Norway's supreme legislature. They had met with President Masud Gharahkhani, who has led the Storting since 2021. The delegation learned that the Storting, created by the Constitution of Norway in 1814, consists of 169 seats and underwent constitutional changes in 2007 to create a more efficient federal government structure. President Gharahkhani is a first-generation immigrant to Norway from Iran and his prominent role highlights the importance of immigration to Norway.

Minister Anne Beathe Tvinnereim, Minister of International Development, also met with the delegation. She has been in this crucial role since 2021 and is responsible for Norwegian foreign aid efforts in regions around the world. The delegation was briefed on her role in facilitating the launch of the Climate Investment Fund in 2022, which aims to reduce avoidable greenhouse gas emissions and invest in renewable energy in developing countries. Minister Tvinnereim's office is responsible for development cooperation under the auspices of the United Nations system, the World Bank, regional development banks, and other global funds and programs.

Following meetings in Oslo, delegates traveled to Helsinki, Finland. At a briefing at the U.S. Embassy led by Ambassador Douglas Hickey, the delegation learned about key areas of cooperation between the U.S. and Finland. Ambassador Hickey highlighted Finland's deep commitment to utilizing U.S. technology, exemplified by their historical purchases of F-18s and the current order of over 60 F-35 aircraft. The delegation was also informed about Finland's highly mobile navy, specifically designed for navigating the challenging geography of the Baltic Sea. Finland's efforts to increase cooperation and deepen contacts across all sectors were emphasized through the signing of memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with multiple U.S. states.

At the Finnish Ministry of Defense meeting, Defense Minister Antti Kaikkonen briefed the delegation on Finland's defense policies and priorities. Delegates met with members of the Ministry's NATO, Baltic, Russian Affairs, and Arctic security teams. Finnish officials expressed immense



pride in Finland's accession to NATO, believing they can offer the alliance unique perspectives and frontline security support. They highlighted their cooperation with NATO since 1994, enabling Finnish troops and officials to quickly adapt to the alliance. The Minister of Defense reiterated support for Sweden joining NATO, recognizing the importance of collaboration in addressing security challenges. The significance of the Arctic in Finnish and European security was emphasized, with the expectation that its importance will continue to grow as polar ice melts. Given Finland's long history with Russia, it was noted that the country is able to provide valuable insights into dealing with asymmetric power relationships, not unlike the one between Taiwan and China.

A meeting with the Finnish Confederation of Industry allowed the delegation to discuss economic and business priorities. The conversation was led by Mr. Timo Vouri, Director of International Trade & Trade Policy, and Major General Kim Mattsson, Security Policy Advisor. The delegation was briefed on the Confederation that represents and supports 20 member associations and 15,300 member companies across all business sectors, with 96% of them being small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The importance of cooperation among democratic partners was emphasized, especially considering that only approximately 30% of the world's countries are democratic. Delegates learned about the Confederation's focus on increasing research and development within Finland while highlighting Finland's secure and attractive environment for international business investment.



The delegation also met with the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) and was briefed by Dr. Mikael Wigell, the Research Director of FIIA. The FIIA was established by the Parliament of Finland in 2006 and remains autonomous in its research activities. The delegation learned that the FIIA conducts research, organizes domestic and international seminars, and publishes reports on various international issues.



Lastly, the delegation visited the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led by Ambassador Mikael Antell, the Deputy Director General of the Political Department. Ambassador Antell discussed Finland's role in NATO and how the country contributes to the alliance. He highlighted how Finland's history under Swedish and Russian rule has shaped modern Finnish

society and beliefs. The delegation learned about the challenges posed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which created political, economic, and social challenges for Finland. Delegates were given insight into the significant trade relationship between Finland and Russia, as well as the impact of issuing Russian visas. Ambassador Antell expressed concerns that due to the increased focus on Ukraine, collaboration in the Arctic region has waned.

Overall, the meetings in Oslo and Helsinki provided the Pacific Council Delegation with valuable insights into key bilateral relationships, defense cooperation, humanitarian efforts, international development, and regional security. The delegation gained a deeper understanding of the shared values, interests, and collaborations between the United States, Norway, and Finland.

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