

Antarctica Month – Treaty Fact Sheet

- Although not linked directly, the origins of the Antarctic Treaty can be traced to the International Geophysical Year (IGY), which actually spanned an 18-month period from 1 July 1957 to 31 December 1958. This period of international scientific co-operation involved scientists from 67 countries and focused on the exploration of space and Antarctica. The success of the IGY coupled with the dramatic increase in activity in Antarctica highlighted the need for some form of political framework to promote international harmony in the region. By this time, seven nations (Argentina, Australia, Chile, Ecuador, France, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom) had made territorial claims on the continent and its surrounding seas. These claims were not recognised by all the parties – and clearly some form of international agreement was needed.
- A Chilean proposal, known as the 1948 Escudero Declaration, was used as a starting point for discussion. This proposed a five-year moratorium on sovereignty disputes, the political neutrality of expeditions and the principle of free access to the region to allow scientific research to continue.
- Representatives of 12 nations met regularly in Washington from mid-1958 until early 1959 to discuss the proposals and draft a treaty. On the 1st of December, 1959, the Antarctic Treaty was signed by government representatives of Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, the then USSR, the UK and the USA. The treaty actually came into effect on the 23rd of June 1961 and the signatory states became known as the 12 consultative nations.
- The Antarctic Treaty contains 14 articles, which enshrine the following principles:
 - Antarctica (meaning the entire region south of latitude 60° South) is to be used for peaceful purposes only and military bases, manoeuvres and weapons testing are prohibited. The prohibition also extends to nuclear explosions and the disposal of nuclear waste.
 - The promotion of scientific investigation and co-operation, with the exchange of information, plans, results and personnel to be actively encouraged. This also includes freedom of access for the purpose of scientific investigation.
 - Territorial claims are not recognised, disputed or established by the Treaty, and no new claims are to be asserted.
- The original treaty has been amended and extended, creating the Antarctic Treaty System, which includes the conventions and recommendations made at the regular meetings.
 - One of the most important parts of the Antarctic Treaty System is the Protocol on Environmental Protection (also known as the Madrid Protocol). This established Antarctica as a “natural reserve devoted to peace and science” and all consultative members agreed to take responsibility for the environmental management of their Antarctic activities.
 - By May 2000, 15 additional nations (Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Ecuador, Finland, Germany, India, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Peru, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, Spain and Uruguay) had achieved consultative status. Russia took over the privileges and responsibilities of the USSR.
 - A further 17 nations (Austria, Canada, Colombia, Cuba, the Czech Republic, the Democratic People’s republic of Korea, Denmark, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, Papua New Guinea, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, and Venezuela) have acceded to the Treaty. They are granted observer status at the consultative meetings.
- The 44 Antarctic Treaty nations together represent about two-thirds of the world population.
- South Africa is at present the African continent’s sole representative.
- The 28th International Conference on the Antarctic was held in Stockholm from the 6th to the 17th

of June this year. Items on the agenda included the effect of global warming and tourism on Antarctica.

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