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United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Fifteenth Session

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Item 4:
Implementation of the six mandated areas of the
Permanent Forum

Joint statement on behalf of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden

Delivered by Ms. Anne Karin Olli, State Secretary
Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, Norway

Chair,

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries: Denmark with Greenland, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, and my own country Norway.

We take this opportunity to express our support to the Forum as an important venue for the promotion of dialogue between governments, indigenous peoples and the UN system. We look forward to an engaging dialogue in the coming days.

(Check against delivery)

Chair,

All of the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum are important to ensure the respect, protection and promotion of the human rights of Indigenous Peoples. Allow me to elaborate on some issues that we have identified as particularly pertinent for this Forum to consider.

Indigenous peoples are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of global climate change and the increasing pressure on the world's natural resources. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples clearly recognizes that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to a sustainable and equitable development. Since this Forum last met, we have seen the adoption of a new Global Agreement on Climate Change (COP 21).

We need to recognize the special contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities in our common efforts for sustainable development. Their contribution will be a crucial determinant of success for the new global framework on climate change. Indigenous Peoples also play a critically important role in climate mitigation and adaptation, not least through their historic role as the most effective stewards of much of the world's remaining forests. This was reflected in the high visibility of indigenous peoples at the climate summit in Paris, as well as in the historical Paris Agreement to keep global warming below two degrees.

Deforestation and forest degradation affect not only the life of indigenous peoples – it has detrimental effects on the environment and therefore affects all of us. To reduce emissions from deforestation and to make use of the urgent mitigation opportunity that tropical forests represent, there is a need to invest in secure tenure for indigenous peoples. This could include strengthening their participation in planning the management and use of State-owned land and water areas traditionally used by them.

(Check against delivery)

In the Arctic region, the Sami people's and the Inuit's way of life and traditional livelihood is also threatened by climate change, especially in relation to reindeer husbandry, fishing, farming, hunting and gathering. These livelihoods are cornerstones of the Inuit and Sami culture, and a loss might have fatal consequences for Sami and Inuit languages, cultures and community lives.

Chair,

The right to education applies to each and every child in the world, without discrimination. Still, we know that there is a significant education gap between indigenous peoples and the general population in many countries.

Through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by promising to leave no one behind, the international community has made a commitment to provide inclusive and equitable education at all levels. Lack of instruction in mother tongue, particularly in the early years, is a barrier to quality learning. To overcome this barrier, effective measures to ensure qualified and motivated teachers, as well as appropriate learning material is needed.

In addition to good learning effects, promoting the use of mother tongue in kindergartens and schools for children of indigenous peoples plays an important role in ensuring the continued development of indigenous language and identity.

It is my wish that we can work to develop the educational system to create better opportunities for Sami children and youth to a life-long career within the context of Sami language and culture.

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The Nordic countries further wish to highlight the need to create and develop equal access to health and care services for indigenous peoples and the majority population. Equal access is an issue that needs attention on a permanent basis — in close cooperation with the indigenous peoples concerned.

To attain our goals it is crucial that health personnel and care workers have sufficient knowledge of the languages and cultures of the indigenous peoples. However, recruiting a sufficient number of Sami-speaking health personnel and care workers sometimes proves challenging.

Considering my own experience as a public health nurse, I know that it is essential to create an environment of openness and trust in the contact between the users and the health personnel. It is my belief that necessary measures to ensure equal and adapted health services for indigenous peoples, must be reflected in the planning and decision-making processes, and designed in cooperation with the peoples concerned – based on their own views and priorities.

Thank you.

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