

**Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
2nd Session New York, May 12-23 2003**



Joint statement by Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic Region

Item 4c: Health

Delivered by Aqqaluk Lynge, President of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, Greenland on behalf of the Arctic Indigenous Region

Thank you Mr. Chair;

I want to congratulate you on your reelection as Chairman of this Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I know that your leadership and continuity will help all of us make substantial progress in the years to come.

I am speaking on behalf of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the Saami Council and Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North - all Indigenous Peoples' Organizations of the Arctic.

Mr. Chairman

As we know, health is more than the absence of disease. It refers to the state of the whole person and has a direct bearing on the development of the individual and her or his quality of life. Spiritual, emotional, psychological, and physical well-being are all elements to be considered in striving for good health. Cultural and environmental factors must also be fully taken into account.

Arctic peoples have learned, over thousands of years, that there is a direct link between our physical environment and our human health, and, indeed, survival.

The state of our physical environment affects our human health as we know from a crashed USA Air Force bomber leaking plutonium off the coast of Greenland, and massive oil spills in the Russian Komi Republic, and the flooding of lands due to the hydro dams build in the Alta River in Saami Land.

Mr. Chairman;

The Arctic regions of the world share common characteristics such as sparse population, harsh climate, geographic features, latitude of location, and seasonal extremes. There are, however, significant differences in political systems, languages and cultural and level of governmental support for Indigenous Peoples issues. All of these factors impact upon climate change and transboundary pollution and their resulting impacts on our human health and our capacity to adapt to these changes.

Mr. Chairman;

Among other factors, political and economic differences across the Arctic have resulted in dramatic differences in the health status of our peoples. For example, the

average of life span of Russian Indigenous Peoples is 20 years lower than other Russian citizens.

Available human health data vary widely across the Arctic, and are sometimes non-existent in some regions. The evaluation of the impact of climate change and transboundary pollution on human health are entirely dependent on data. There is currently an extensive survey on the living conditions of Arctic Peoples (SLICA) being undertaken which will, among other things, touch upon human health.

Recommendations:

1. We therefore urge the Permanent Forum to ask the World Health Organization through ECOSOC to use the SLICA data, to develop a greater focus on the Arctic in its work.
2. We recommend that the Permanent Forum contact and work closely with the Arctic Council, which is a high level governmental body of 8 Arctic States dealing with, among other things, protection of the Arctic environment and human health, and place a special emphasis on the health status of Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Arctic.

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Thank you Mr. Chairman