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THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FINLAND

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Statement by President of the Republic of Finland Sauli Niinistö at the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) United Nations, New York 22 September 2014

(Check against delivery)

I'm honored to address the first United Nations World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. The participation of especially Indigenous Peoples' representatives, in the Conference and in its preparations makes this event special for all of us. It reinforces our joint commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In addition this conference marks an important step in fulfilling a key recommendation made in Alta a year ago. Indigenous Peoples should have the right to participate in matters concerning them in the United Nations. We look forward to the Secretary-General's proposals in this regard. In this context, we must express our concern over the reported attempts to prevent representatives of Indigenous Peoples from Russia to join us today.

Indigenous Peoples' participation in decision-making is vital also at the national level. Procedures may vary from country to country, but in all cases the objective should be to reach consensus in good faith. In Finland, authorities are obliged by law to negotiate with the Sámi Parliament, the representative body of the indigenous Sámi. Recently, the Finnish Government has worked together with the Sámi Parliament to expand the scope of the obligation to consult. The proposed reform spells out the concept of free, prior and informed consent.

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Echoing the words of Kofi Annan, "Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies." And now we are witnessing how young indigenous delegates are playing an important role in this Conference. Indigenous youth must have the right, means, and support to participate in their societies. To that end, access to education, information and means of communication is essential.

In Finland, the Sámi youth have taken significant steps to improve their cultural and political participation through the establishment of the Sámi Youth Council. Measures to revive Indigenous languages, including language nest activities for children, have been found an efficient way to strengthen the identity of young indigenous people.

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Finland's role in the Arctic is defined by our geography; by our Arctic expertise, our emphasis on sustainable development and environmental considerations; and by international cooperation. To secure the welfare of people living in the Arctic is of key importance. We are convinced that this contributes to economic stability and enhances competitiveness. Climate change has consequences to us all. We must address them together.

Industries such as fishing, herding, hunting and tourism are vital to Arctic business development and to the livelihoods of the peoples in the Arctic. Finland is very pleased with the establishment of the Arctic Economic Council two weeks ago in Iqaluit, Canada. Arctic business leaders and Indigenous peoples work together with the aim to facilitate Arctic business-to-business activities and responsible economic development. Traditional knowledge, stewardship and a focus on small businesses will play a central role in this work. Finland will continue to support this work also in the future.

The Nordic countries have a long tradition in cooperation with the Sámi and Greenlandic representative bodies. Cross-border cooperation is vital in finding common solutions to common challenges. Internationally we work together on issues such as biodiversity.

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Cooperation between different stakeholders is not without challenges. Only true dialogue with all relevant stakeholders will yield solid results beneficial for all. For this reason, the voices of the Indigenous Peoples must be heard also at the United Nations.