



Economic and Social Council

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Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Ninth Session

**H.E. Mr. Morten Wetland
Ambassador
Permanent Representative**

Chair,

Allow me, at the outset, to congratulate you on your election and to express the gratitude of the Government of Norway to the previous chair, Ms Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, for her excellent stewardship of this body over the past five years.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is a primary source and compass for the human rights of indigenous peoples. The Declaration is of paramount importance as it strengthens knowledge and consciousness about existing rights, and thereby strengthens implementation of indigenous rights.

Indigenous peoples right to self-determination, and their right to be consulted in land matters that affect them directly, laid down in article 3 and 32, are central provisions in the Declaration.

These two articles address issues related to democracy and governance that may have a positive impact on decision-making processes. To ensure indigenous peoples' participation, special consultation procedures are called for when State decisions may affect the particular interests of indigenous peoples.

In Norway, the Sámediggi – the Sami Parliament – and the Government have agreed on specific procedures as to how consultations between Sámediggi and state authorities are to be carried out.

(Check against delivery)

As a consequence of the procedures, 20-40 formalized consultations take place every year. Our experience is that the many consultations have enabled Sámediggi to become a representative and competent voice for the Sami people, and enhanced the awareness and knowledge of Sami issues in Government ministries and agencies, as well as among the cabinet ministers and parliamentarians.

Admittedly, agreement is not always reached between the Government and Sami representatives. However, the consultation mechanism ensures that decision-makers are increasingly well acquainted with the views of the Sámediggi.

A new Mineral Act on exploration and extraction of minerals was adopted by the Norwegian Parliament in the spring of 2009. Consultations with Sámediggi about this new Act were carried out in the period from January 2007 to June 2008. Agreement was achieved on several provisions, although the consultations were concluded without full agreement being reached.

One important concern for Sámediggi was the fact that some provisions regarding Sami interests only apply in the county of Finnmark, while Sami people also live in other counties. Draft bills concerning Sami land rights and resources outside of Finnmark County will soon be under consideration, as part of the follow-up of the Sami Rights Commission, and the Norwegian government intends to engage in further consultations with Sámediggi regarding these issues.

Another ongoing consultation between Sámediggi and the Norwegian Government concerns fishing rights in the sea off the coast of Finnmark County.

A special study about indigenous fishing rights in the sea, giving case studies from Norway and Australia, prepared for the forum by Mr. Carsten Smith and Mr. Michael Dodson, will be presented here at the forum on Monday 26 April.

In line with paragraphs 3 and 32 of the Declaration, the participation of and consultations with indigenous peoples also underpin Norway's international development cooperation policy. This also applies to the Norwegian Government's International Climate and Forest Initiative. We are pleased to announce that the Norwegian Minister of the Environment and International Development will be addressing a side event on this issue at the forum on Monday 26 April.

Norway emphasizes the importance of the three UN mechanisms; the Special Rapporteur, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in strengthening and improving the rights of indigenous peoples. Over the last few days, the Special Rapporteur, Professor James Anaya, has for the first time made an official visit to the Sami people, living across the borders of four countries – Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. The visit was coordinated by the three Sami parliaments in Finland, Sweden and Norway. We are told this is the first time the Special Rapporteur visits *a people* and not a people in one country.

In concluding, we would like to underline the importance of dialogue and cooperation between state authorities and indigenous peoples' representatives, regarding both domestic issues and international affairs. In Norway, the Sami Parliament acts on behalf of the Sami people in Norway. Formally, the representatives from the Sami Parliament in Norway are part of the Norwegian delegation to UN Permanent Forum. However, when the representatives of the Sami Parliament address the Permanent Forum, they speak on behalf of the Sami in Norway, and not on behalf of the Government of Norway. It is our hope that the special status indigenous parliaments enjoy in some jurisdictions be reflected in the meetings of the Permanent Forum.

Thank you.