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President Egil Olli, the Sami Parliamentary Council  
United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 22 April 2008

Madame chair,

Honoured members of the UN's Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues, state representatives, representatives of indigenous peoples and guests.

I speak on behalf of the Sami Parliamentary Council, which represents the Sami parliaments in Norway, Sweden and Finland. The Russian Sami attends as active observers. Our status as indigenous parliamentarians seems to be undefined in the UN context. We are representatives elected by our peoples in official elections. We do not represent private NGOs, either governments with our own mandates. However, we greatly appreciate that we get the opportunity to address this session of the UN Permanent Forum on indigenous issues.

The news coverage has throughout the last year been filled with reports on climate threats all around the globe. The serious environmental challenges associated with climate change call for collective action on the part of society at large. This can only take place by means of binding international agreements, and by actively following up compliance at the national level.

Representing indigenous peoples of the north, we are deeply concerned that the climate change should have negative effect on the environment and the resources which are the foundations for our livelihood, and create changing conditions for our culture and traditions. At the same time we are worrying about that the milder climate should give access to non-renewable resources that until now have not been accessible because of permafrost, ice and snow.

The Sami Parliamentary Council declare our strong support to the recommendations presented by Ms Victoria Tauli-Corpuz and Mr Aqqaluk Lynge in the report on: "Impact on climate change mitigation measures on the territories and lands of indigenous peoples". We specially like to highlight the need for full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in the forthcoming negotiations for the next Kyoto Protocol commitment period. We support the recommendations to establish a Working Group on indigenous and climate changes within UNFCCC. We also support the recommendations produced by the expert meeting in response to climate change for indigenous peoples and the impact on their traditional knowledge related to biological diversity in the Arctic region. We also support the recommendations submitted by the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs following the "Conference on Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change".

An utterly reason to our worries is caused by the fact that neither our governments nor the industrial interests seeking exploration of the non-renewable resources on our territories have recognised our right to take part in the governing of and the right to share in the economic benefits created on industrial resources from our territories.

We therefore confront a threat on changed livelihood caused by climate change without having the recognised right to have a share in the benefits created by exploitation and changed use of our territories. This happens in spite of the obligations expressed by the UN declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the ILO convention 169 to recognise the indigenous people's rights to their lands and recourses.

Madame Chair,

I would like to add that the Sami Parliamentary Council welcomes the adoption of the UN's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples with great satisfaction. We expect and active implementation by the states authorities. In particular this should reflect the right to self-determination, including the right to financing of own activities without the strict limitation established by state budgets. Likewise the rights to land and recourses must be honoured and the principles of free, prior and informed consent established under the right to full information and consultations in good faith should be performed.

In closing, let me acknowledge that we, the Samis, are in a better position than many of the world's indigenous peoples. We have during the last decades obtained that over problems have become included on the national political agenda. In Norway, we have obtained new legislation that in the northernmost region in some extent resolves the land rights issues. There have been established processes that in the next ten years might solve the remaining land rights issues. Three years ago the Sami Parliament in Norway signed an agreement with the government on when and how to conduct consultation in issues of Sami interest. We are still in an early phase of implementation, but we expect and believe that in the kind of committed dialog and processes may serve as an example. There will, however, always have to be a prerequisite that there are a strong will for justice and respect for indigenous peoples rights

Thank you, Madame Chair!