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STATEMENT BY FINLAND

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Agenda Item 4 (a): Human Rights: Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Tenth Session

United Nations, New York
18 May, 2011

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Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished members of the Permanent Forum,
Honorable delegates and participants of the Tenth Session,

Let me start by congratulating you Madame Chair of your appointment as the Chairperson of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

In cooperation with its only indigenous people, the Sámi, Finland participated actively in the drafting process of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We welcome that an increasing number of States are endorsing the Declaration. Wide support to the Declaration is crucial for its effective implementation. The Declaration sets a standard at the political level as well as confirms collective rights of the Indigenous Peoples. Therefore it provides the natural frame of reference for the promotion of indigenous peoples' rights.

We should focus on awareness-raising about the Declaration and its contents. Information about human rights is most accessible when available in one's own language. To have the Declaration in one's own language helps in creating coalitions for action for the rights of the Indigenous Peoples.

Three indigenous languages are spoken in Finland: North Sámi, Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi. We are pleased to inform that the Declaration has now been translated into Finnish as well as to North Sámi and Inari Sami. Translation into Skolt Sami will be completed shortly. We hope that the availability of the Declaration in all these languages will facilitate the increased awareness of the Declaration in Finland.

Madam Chairperson,

The Declaration encompasses a wide array of topics that are essential for promoting indigenous peoples' status. One of these is the right to participate in the decision making processes, as set out in Article 18 of the Declaration.

The Act on the Sámi Parliament guarantees the cultural autonomy of the Sámi as an indigenous people in respect to their language and culture in Finland. The obligation to negotiate with the Sámi Parliament applies to all levels of administration in all far-reaching and important measures which may directly and specifically affect the status of the Sámi as an indigenous people and which concern matters in the Sámi homeland as referred to in the Act.

The social welfare and health services provided to the Sámi in their own language have also been developed over the past decade.

Lately, legislative amendments have been made to improve the consideration of the status of the Sámi as an indigenous people and their opportunities to participate in decision-making.

In March 2011 the Finnish Parliament accepted two proposals for new legislation: a new Mining Act (*HE 273/2009 vp*) and a new Water Act (*HE 277/2009 vp*). Both laws include provisions aimed at an improved consideration of the Sámi as an indigenous people in the decision making included in the Acts. In addition, the Sámi Parliament has been given a right to appeal, if the rights of the Sámi as an indigenous people were not adequately considered when making decisions pursuant to these Acts.

We are also pleased to continue the fruitful practice of having the representatives of the Finnish Sámi Parliament included in the Finnish Delegation to the Forum.

Madam Chairperson,

The Government of Finland wishes to thank Professor James Anaya, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, for his report on the situation of Sámi people in the Sámi region of Norway, Sweden and Finland. The report provides several recommendations on how Finland could further improve the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, for instance on revitalizing Sámi languages and strengthen programmes for education in Sámi languages and culture. The Special Rapporteur's report has lately been translated into Finnish and North Sami to make it better available for all relevant stakeholders in Finland.

In terms of human rights treaties that concern specifically the rights of indigenous peoples, I am pleased to inform you that the negotiations on a Nordic Sami Convention have been started between Norway, Finland and Sweden on March 2011. The delegations set up for the negotiations consist of the representatives of the respective states and the Sami Parliaments. Half of the members in the Finnish delegation are Sami. The negotiations are expected to be concluded within five years. According to the draft convention the aim of the Convention would be to strengthen the rights of the Sámi in such a way they can preserve and develop their language, culture, livelihoods and social life without interference of State borders.

Madam Chairperson,

Let me conclude by inviting you all to a side event co-organized by the Permanent Missions of Ecuador and Finland, the Finnish Sámi Parliament and the Ministry of Coordination of Heritage of Ecuador on Indigenous peoples' institutions and the right to participate in decision-making, especially in the context of education. The side event will take place on Thursday, 19th May at lunch time in Conference room 2.

Chair, I thank you.