

UNPFII: the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 5 years

UN Ambassador **Morten Wetland** on **May 17th**, during the *11th Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues*.

198 years ago today, the Constitution of Norway was adopted establishing Norway's independence and the right of people of Norway to self-determination. This constitution has been amended many times and now makes explicit the responsibility of the Government to create conditions enabling the Sami people to preserve and develop its language, culture and way of life. Today, many proposals for revision of the constitution are under consideration by the Norwegian Parliament. And one of those proposals is to include a specific mention of the status of the Sami people as an indigenous people in the constitution itself.

It is altogether fitting today, that the people of Norway also commemorate the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007.

The Government of Norway participated actively in the work on the Declaration since it started almost three decades ago. Our goal was to arrive at a Declaration that could strengthen the protection of all the world's indigenous peoples. The Declaration contextualizes all existing human rights for indigenous peoples and it has become a beacon of light and hope for millions of indigenous peoples' in their struggles to establish their rights.

Representatives from the Sami Parliament were included in the Norwegian delegation to the negotiations in the United Nations in all meetings. This was a valuable and necessary contribution to the whole process.

Important principles of the Declaration were already implemented in Norway's national legal framework, such as the Sami Act and the Finnmark Act.

Unsurprisingly, there are still issues that have not been resolved. There is for example an ongoing process regarding land rights and management in traditional Sami areas south of Finnmark.

Since the year 2005, we have an Agreement on Procedures for Consultations between the State Authorities and the Sami Parliament. The Procedures for Consultations seek to ensure that the Sami people can genuinely participate in and have a real influence on decision-making processes that may affect Sami interests directly.

Full agreement cannot be reached on all matters, but it is important that the democratic processes contribute to the best possible outcome.

As for the question on Sami self-determination, the Norwegian government and the Sami Parliament do not see eye to eye on each and every issue such as for example the scope of this right and on how the right should be implemented in different areas. There is also a constructive dialogue on these issues.

The Government has translated the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into North Sami, and by July this year we will also have translations into South Sami and Lule Sami. Language is a major element of Sami culture, and it is important to ensure that the Sami languages are in daily use. Through these translations the Declaration we are commemorating today will be available to all three major Sami languages.

Thank you.