

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Eleventh session

Agenda item 4: Human rights

Statement by the Arctic Caucus

Thank you Mr. Chairperson,

The Arctic Caucus, as always, welcomes the presence of Special Rapporteur Professor James Anaya, at the Permanent Forum. We extend our gratitude to him and his team for their tremendous efforts to advance the rights of indigenous peoples. We strongly welcome the Special Rapporteur's decision to focus on the issue of indigenous peoples' human rights and industry, during the remainder of his term.

The Arctic is subject to industrial exploitation that only continues to accelerate. Inuit and Sami communities are under a quickly growing pressure from, among others, oil and gas, mining, forestry and wind mill industries. Associated with these industrial activities is a web of infrastructure that continues to consume our traditional territories.

The Arctic states actively support the explosion of industrial activities in the Arctic. The basic position seems to be that most possible resources shall be extracted in the shortest feasible period of time. No other strategy appears even to be contemplated, despite the fact that the present one is unsustainable. Would it not make more sense that no more resources are extracted from the Arctic each year than it takes to feed the people living in the region? Or perhaps it at least makes sense to develop a more long term plan, according to which it is not necessary to empty the Arctic of resources within the next decade? Some resources could perhaps be saved for future generations to extract? Presently, such options appear not even to be on the table.

The states support the race to the Arctic, but are not the main players in the industrial revolution happening there. Rather, it is mainly private enterprises, most of which are not from the Arctic states, that deprive the Arctic of its resources. The cumulative effect of these corporations' activities on Inuit and Sami local communities is enormous. One single

reindeer community can have 3-4 mining projects, 2-3 windmill park projects and annual clear-cutting of forested areas occurring on its traditional territories simultaneously. Industrial activities consume the communities land at such speed that it is often not even possible to see the full picture effect of what will be the accumulated consequences of the activities on the community.

Industrial activities are allowed to destroy Inuit and Sami communities' traditional territory at unprecedented pace, despite the fact that the laws of the states within which we reside in principle recognize that the communities hold property rights to land. These rights should, if respected and implemented, offer useful protection for the communities against industrial activities. The main problem is that these property rights are not reflected in legislation regulating industrial activities, such as in mining and forestry acts. The result is accumulated industrial activities that risk destroying the possibility for many Inuit and Sami communities to continuously pursue our traditional livelihoods.

Three sorts of action can address the outlined problem. First, the Inuit and the Sami and the respective state need to agree on revisions of laws regulating industrial activities, such as mining and forestry acts, with the aim of ensuring both that industrial activities respect communities' property rights to land and that Inuit and Sami traditional livelihoods and industrial activities can coexist. In addition, states, together with indigenous peoples, need to develop a long term strategy for resource extraction, to halt the race to the Arctic. As the principal political body for Arctic affairs, it is natural that the Arctic Council takes the lead in developing such a strategy. Moreover, private entities too, should be obliged to behave in a manner responsible towards the environment and the indigenous cultures in the Arctic, when operating there, through accepting to comply with an ethical code of conduct. It is natural that the Arctic Council takes the lead in this project as well, as it already engage in developing such a code.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Arctic Caucus put forward the following recommendations for the Permanent Forum's consideration:

Recommends that the Arctic Council adopts, at its Ministerial Meeting in 2015, a comprehensive long term strategy for resource extraction in the Arctic region, to end present uncontrolled, unmanaged and unsustainable industrial practices;

Recommends also that the Arctic Council adopts, at its Ministerial Meeting in 2015, an ethical code of conduct, committing private entities operating in the Arctic region not to engage in

practices harmful to the environment and to respect human rights, particularly those of the indigenous inhabitants of the Arctic;

We also reiterate our recommendation put forward during the land rights session;

Decides that the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues shall, before its 14th session, present a proposal on an Optional Protocol to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The purpose of the Optional Protocol shall be to establish voluntary mechanism to serve as complaint body on international level for breaches of land rights on domestic level.

We thank you.