

Nordic Statement
Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Twelfth session

Item 7 Human rights

Joint Statement of behalf of the Nordic countries

Delivered by Sweden

Madam Chairperson,

I have the honor to address the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on behalf of the Nordic countries: Denmark with Greenland, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and my own country Sweden.

For decades, the Nordic countries have been firm supporters of the rights of indigenous peoples as an integral part of our efforts to promote free, democratic societies based on the rule of law and equal rights for all. We wish to take this opportunity to once again reiterate this commitment.

Indeed, most of Europe's indigenous peoples live within the territories of our countries. We remain strongly committed to improving the lives and enhancing the rights of indigenous peoples not only in our own countries but world-wide by promoting the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and by continuing our support to the mandates and mechanisms set in place in the UN system to promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples.

We note with appreciation the preparatory process initiated by the indigenous peoples. The global preparatory meeting to be held in Alta, Norway, the second week of June, will give us all the needed input and positions of the indigenous peoples themselves.

Madam Chairperson,

Last year we celebrated the 5th anniversary of the adoption of the mentioned Declaration. This achievement was the result of continuous efforts and hard work throughout many years.

Despite the significant progress made over the last decade, indigenous peoples around the world continue to face injustices and live in hardship due to the failure of States to recognize

and uphold their rights. It is deplorable that while indigenous peoples around the world have enormous potential and could play an important role in tackling global problems such as climate change, many of them remain among the most marginalized groups in their countries suffering from poverty, exclusion from decision-making processes and subjection to violence.

There is in other words a notable gap between the ideals of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the implementation on the ground. This gap must be addressed.

Madam Chairperson,

We believe that the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples presents an important opportunity to bring indigenous peoples' rights to the attention of the international community and to generate the needed political will.

It is our hope that the World Conference in 2014 will result in substantive and concrete action towards the full realization of the rights of indigenous peoples, in accordance with the Declaration.

On that note, we would like to stress that the full and effective participation and consultation of indigenous peoples through all stages of the conference including in the development of the outcome document is imperative to the success of the conference. We also look forward to the participation of civil society at large as we believe that they can bring an added value to the contributions of Member States and indigenous peoples.

Madam Chairperson,

The Nordic countries welcome the work of the three UN mechanisms for the protection and promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples: The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These mechanisms are complementary, and we find it crucial that coordination is ensured to avoid duplication of work and to create synergies. We also lend our full support to the programme of action for the second Decade which we believe would further the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples. Furthermore, the UN Indigenous Peoples' Partnership (UNIPP) contributes to mainstreaming indigenous rights in the UN

system and aims to deliver tangible progress at the country level. This unique inter-agency initiative deserves our full support. The Nordic countries highly appreciate the work of the Special Rapporteur, Mr. James Anaya, and will continue to provide strong support to his mandate. We look forward to his presentation and the opportunity for dialogue here at the Permanent Forum.

Madam Chairperson,

The Nordic countries wish to stress the importance of maintaining our focus on the rights of indigenous women and girls. They continue to often suffer from the cross section of multiple forms of discrimination, as women and girls, as members of an indigenous people and as indigenous individuals. Too many of them face poverty and economic inequities, are subjected to trafficking, and struggle with illiteracy, lack of access to justice and non-existent or poor health care. All this increases their vulnerability to violence both in private and public sphere. This violence is exacerbated when indigenous communities find themselves in the midst of conflict and where women become targets of politically motivated violence.

Still, there are numerous indigenous women and girls who not only act for their own rights and for their own political, economic and social empowerment, but speak out for the rights of their people and for their communities. They are also key actors in revitalizing, using, developing and transmitting indigenous peoples' traditions, cultures and languages to future generations. We must enable this by providing both legislative and practical measures to ensure the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for them without discrimination.

We also wish to draw attention to the worrying examples around the world where indigenous peoples are disproportionately negatively affected by business-related activities, such as natural resource extraction and infrastructure development. In this regard, we welcome the work of the Human Rights Council's Working Group on Human Rights and Business as well as the work of the OECD in developing guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.

Although States are the duty bearer in promoting, safeguarding and ensuring the human rights of indigenous peoples, third parties, including business enterprises, also have a responsibility to ensure that they do not commit or contribute to human rights abuses.

Madam Chairperson,

Participation in decision-making processes is of fundamental importance for the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples. The right of indigenous peoples to participate and the States' duty to consult are therefore core elements in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The goal is to ensure the meaningful and effective participation of indigenous peoples in decision-making in matters affecting their rights, and in United Nations' bodies where issues that concern them directly are considered through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures.

However, many barriers exist for indigenous peoples' representatives in participating both at the UN at large and in relation to the specialized UN bodies.

On behalf of the Nordic countries, I would like to express our appreciation of the report prepared by the Secretary General on participation at the United Nations of indigenous peoples' representatives on issues affecting them and the right to participate in decision-making. As we see it, it is imperative and imminent that this vital issue is further explored in partnership between Member States and indigenous peoples based on the findings and suggestions of the report before new procedures are finalized and adopted. A central issue must be to ensure the effective and maximum participation of representatives of indigenous peoples in this work.

Madam Chairperson,

In conclusion, the Nordic countries reiterate our appreciation and support for the work done by indigenous peoples, States, regional organizations, NGOs and the different UN Mechanisms, notably the Permanent Forum, in advancing indigenous rights, and look forward to future collaboration.

I thank you, Madam Chairperson.