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15th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Agenda item 4: Implementation of the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum
with reference to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Tuesday May 10th 2016

Nordic statement

Delivered by:

Mr. Per Olsson Fridh,

State Secretary to the Minister of Culture and Democracy of Sweden

Thank you Chairperson,

I have the honor to make this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries: Denmark with Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Finland and my own country Sweden.

"We do not even exist, we are subterranean beings. We are invisible, you can walk through us. And they will laugh, if you tell them. That we have homes, camps. That we also have rights, that we also exist. We do not seem to exist. And those who do not exist, cannot demand anything. Anything!"

That was part of a poem by the Sámi author Nils Aslak Valkeapää, winner of the Nordic Council literature price in 1991. I believe it highlights in a poetic yet evident way what many of the issues we are here to discuss are all about – that is protecting the human rights of those who throughout history to a large extent have been neglected.

Chairperson,

For us, the Nordic countries, the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples have been and continue to be longstanding priorities.

In 2014, at the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, UN Member States agreed by consensus to undertake commitments to further promote the realization of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The Outcome Document provides States with a useful road-map for the realization of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and it is now the responsibility of all States to live up to these commitments.

The UN Declaration was a milestone in recognizing the status and rights of Indigenous Peoples, and fulfilling its objectives requires continuous and consistent work both at the national and international level. The consensus adoption of the Outcome Document confirms that this is a common commitment made by us all.

The Nordic countries continuously co-operate with each other and with other countries to ensure that indigenous peoples have their human rights protected. However, all countries continue to have challenges in this regard.

Chairperson,

Challenges are indeed also evident in our Countries. To meet some of these, three Nordic countries – namely Sweden, Norway and Finland – are currently negotiating a Nordic Sámi Convention. Sámi representatives take part and play a crucial role in these. Our hope with the negotiations is that the process shall contribute to a common understanding of unresolved issues.

The overall objective with developing a Nordic Sámi Convention is to secure the protection of human rights of the Sámi so that they can preserve and develop their language, culture, livelihood and social life. Given that the Sámi is an indigenous people living in all three countries, a Nordic Sámi Convention also aims at ensuring that this can be done with as little restriction to State boundaries as possible.

We hope, and indeed we believe, that this can also serve as a good example on how to address the issue of fulfilling the ends of the UNDRIP.

Reaching a final agreement on the pending issues in the negotiations is a priority for all three countries and we hope to finalize this process as soon as possible.

Chairperson,

Human rights defenders engaged in the promotion of human rights of indigenous peoples are targeted and subject to intimidation, harassments and violence. Civic space is shrinking in many countries – legal restrictions have been imposed in more than 50 countries during later years. In some countries indigenous human rights defenders are particularly subjected to violence, too often resulting in tragic deaths.

Attacks on human rights defenders worldwide must come to an end. A clear message was sent in March, when the UN Human Rights Council adopted the Norwegian-led resolution on the protection of human rights defenders, which explicitly mentions the situation of indigenous human rights defenders.

The Nordic countries call strongly on all States to abide by their human rights obligations and commitments, by ensuring that indigenous human rights defenders can work without fear of being subjected to any form of reprisal, harassment, intimidation or violence.

Chairperson,

As concluded by the Special Rapporteur in her report to the Human Rights Council in September, the situation faced by indigenous women and girls is particularly severe.

Indigenous women and girls experience complex, multidimensional and mutually reinforcing human rights violations and abuses. Indigenous women and girls also suffer from different forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence.

The Nordic countries would therefore like to place specific emphasis on the importance of safe-guarding the rights of indigenous women and girls. We consider it vital that these human rights violations and abuses, including the causes and consequences of violence against indigenous women and girls, are thoroughly addressed and that those responsible are held accountable.

Finally, chairperson,

Let me conclude by saying that the protection of human rights of indigenous peoples is a matter of justice and decency – all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Indigenous peoples are not exempted. It is the responsibility of all States to ensure that the human rights of indigenous peoples are protected.

Thank you.