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## UN PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

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Statement by  
**Mr. Pekka Aikio, president**  
**Saami Parliamentarian Council**  
**Finnish Saami Parliament**

*Thank you Madam Chair,*

In the outset I wish to congratulate your nomination as Chair of the Permanent Forum, especially when I see in you not only a highly qualified indigenous leader and woman but also a good friend whom I have known and been able to work with a long time already. We in the Sápmi look forward working with your able leadership after *Ole Henrik Magga* in the Forum ahead in times to come.

My name is *Pekka Aikio* and I speak on behalf of the *Saami Parliamentarian Council and Finnish Saami Parliament*. Saami Parliamentarian Council, which was established in 2000, is a co-operative organization of the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish Saami Parliaments. At the moment, Russian Saami's hold an observer status but hopefully they will soon join with us as full members, since they are in a process to establish a Russian Saami Parliament. Leadership in the Parliamentarian Council rotates between three Saami Parliaments and now this spring, Finnish Saami Parliament took over the Chairmanship.

*Madam Chair,*

Permanent Forum has successfully fulfilled many expectations which has been put forward during the past decade. We are happy to witness the good working relations between Indigenous Peoples, UN Member States and UN Agencies in the Permanent Forum. For the future of Permanent Forum it is very important that the secretariat of the Forum will always be staffed with qualified indigenous individuals.

Many of us in the room were not so happy of the outcome of the first Indigenous Decade. Even though the Permanent Forum was established, the Decade wasn't able to reach many of its goals. Since we are at the beginning of the second UN Decade of Indigenous Peoples, the Saami Parliamentarian Council and the Saami Parliament in Finland would like to see more concrete measures to be taken and the many important aims of the Decade to be implemented. I can only mention unsolved land rights questions, the indigenous intellectual property issues and problems with governments in attempts to find solutions in overall self determination questions. At the beginning of the second Indigenous Decade I again urge governments and indigenous groups, all over the world to work together in order to look for positive solutions and to find them. As in any case, the actions measure more than words.

Meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples to processes concerning them is prerequisite for succesful outcome. Several Voluntary Funds for Indigenous Peoples make Indigenous participation possible. After having said this, it should also be pointed out that several Voluntary

Funds increase the costs of management of the Funds. That is why, the Parliamentarian Council would recommend that all Funds should be incorporated as one Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples, but keeping in mind, that incorporation should not have any reverse or negative effect on the allocations by the funders. Also, both the UN Member States and UN Agencies should increase their allocations for Voluntary Fund in order to secure indigenous participation in important processes.

*Madam Chair,*

The promotion of sustainable development and the biodiversity have become an object of global focus during the past recent decades. The industrial part of our common globe seems to tend to conquer and change the nature, while indigenous people tend to adapt to the environment and live in harmony with it. So the majority people on our globe have a lot to learn from indigenous people and especially from their ways to use the resources of our natural environment in a sustainable manner. It is interesting to note that many studies point out the clear positive correlation between biological and cultural diversities.

I will conclude my statement by mentioning an ongoing dispute between Saami traditional reindeer herding and the Finnish Board of Forestry about logging the last old forests in the Inari region in Finnish side of Saamiland. This is a splendid example to show how we could promote the sustainable use of the subarctic reindeer land and diversities both in nature and culture by protecting the saami reindeer herding from logging. These forests serve as necessary winter grazing areas for the reindeer and source of a spiritual well being of the Saami, are utmost important for the traditional Saami reindeer herding. Logging of these crucial grazing grounds will ruin the traditional Saami reindeer herding which still is one of the most important traditional livelihoods of the Saami. Here I would like to pay attention to the oncoming Nordic Saami Convention, now under preparation. This expert group hopefully will explore the possibilities to reintroduce the old Saamicodisill from 1751 which regulated Saami land use rights beyond nation state (today's Finland, Sweden and Norway) borders. That is a remarkable example of utilization of really common resources and the legal regulation in relation to it.

Confrontation has negative impacts on the identity and self-esteem of the Saami children and youth, since the part of the local non-Saami population is spreading negative attitude towards reindeer herders, who have stood up for their rights. Overall negative attitude towards Saami can mean, that young Saami who are struggling with their identity will then abandon their Saami heritage forever. Confrontations, like the one in Inari, make it difficult for young Saami to find any reliable future in the traditional livelihood of his or her ancestors. This is great concern for the Saami Parliamentarian Council and for the Saami society as whole.

In conclusion I will stress the significance of indigenous parliaments all over the world. These democratically elected indigenous representations should be given an independent position in relevant international organizations, especially within the UN-systems.

*Thank you Madam Chair.*