

Working Group on Indigenous Populations
26.-30. July 1999
Item 4. Review of developments
General statement of the
government of Finland
by Mr. Eero J. Aarnio



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Madam Chairperson,

As it is the first time my delegation takes the floor, I would like to congratulate you, on behalf of the Finnish government, for your reelection as the Chairperson-Rapporteur of this Working Group. The experience from more than ten years proves that your chairmanship will be the best guarantee for the success of this seventeenth session of the Working Group.

Madam Chairperson,

I would like to take the opportunity of thanking you for your highly respected visit in Finland last midsummer. I hope that you have good memories from the midnight sun in the Sami Homeland, in spite of the attacks of mosquitos. I'm especially happy if you, too, consider successful the Inari workshop on the Right of the Indigenous Peoples to self-determination organized by the Sami People together with the Institute for Human Rights of the Åbo Akademi. Personally, I'm sure that the outcome of this workshop will be very useful for the discussions on the declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

The Finnish government has declared the rights of indigenous peoples as one of the keypoints of the Finnish Human Rights policy. We are very happy for the progress achieved in the process towards the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples. There is a real need for an established and strengthened cooperation in the sphere of the United Nations between indigenous peoples all over the world. We urge likewise on every effort to finalize the text of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as soon as possible after the mid-point of the Decade of the World's Indigenous People. We are ready for cooperation with every group concerned to accelerate the process towards the final text.

Some progress seems to be found to report about the promotion of the situation of the Finnish Sami people, too. A special rapporteur has been appointed by the Ministry of Justice to make proposals for the strengthening of the Sami land rights on the usufruct of land in the possession of the State in the Sami Homeland in order to make it possible for Finland to ratify the ILO convention nr 169 on the rights of indigenous Peoples. The aim of this project is by no means to influence the investigation commissioned to the Sami Parliament on the right to land, water and natural resources of the Sami People.

Madam Chairperson,

By these words I wish best success to this session of the Working Group.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.