

21 May 2009
Raimo Valle
5- ARCTIC

PF09 Raimo Valle

Permanent forum on indigenous issues – 8th session, New York 21 May 2009

Statement by State Secretary Raimo Valle, Ministry of Labour and Social

Inclusion

Agenda item 5 – Half day discussion on the Arctic.

Madame Chair,

The Sámi People of Northern Europe is *one people* residing across the national borders of four different national States - Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia - with their own distinct identity, languages, culture and cultural expressions, social structures, traditions, livelihoods, and history. In spite of being separated by national borders, there is a strong common identity amongst the different Sámi groups.

The Kingdom of Norway is founded on the territory of two peoples, the Norwegian and the Sámi. There is no exact figure on how many Sámis that are living in Norway, but it is estimated that the number is between 50 – 65.000 of a total population of 4,6 millions. The Norwegian Sámis are not an entirely homogenous group. There are differences in languages and culture, but still there is more binding them together than what sets them apart.

Madame Chair,

In 2002, an expert group was appointed by the Ministers of Sami affairs in Finland, Norway and Sweden and the presidents of the Sami Parliaments in these countries. The expert group submitted in 2005 a draft convention on Nordic Sami cooperation. Since then, the draft has been the object of broad hearings and analysis at the national level, also in cooperation with the Sami Parliaments.

The draft convention consists of 51 articles. The overall objective of the draft convention is to affirm and strengthen the rights of the indigenous Sámi people, with particular emphasis on securing and developing the Sámi language, culture, livelihoods and society. The draft convention recognizes the Sámi people as an indigenous people of the three countries, as one people residing across national borders. The draft convention contains a set of minimum standards, based on existing and emerging international human rights standard.

It is my sincere hope that the states of Norway, Finland and Sweden and the three Sámi Parliaments, can reach an agreement this year on how to proceed with negotiations about a Nordic Sami convention.

Madame Chair,

A strategy for the development of the Norwegian High North has been an important issue for my government. This strategy includes increased activity and a stronger strategic focus on efforts to protect the environment and respond to climate change. The focus on the High North will make it easier to see these issues, and how they are interrelated, in the context of our foreign policy vis-à-vis other countries and in international forums.

People-to-people cooperation is an important part of Norway's High North policy. Health, education, culture, sport, child and youth work and volunteer activities are key components. Opportunities for people to come together to take part in joint activities in these areas foster mutual understanding and trust which in turn foster stability and development in this region.

On March 12th this year my Government presented the latest strategies for further development of the region. The establishment of a transnational knowledge program

and a separate program for indigenous industrial development based on indigenous culture and traditional knowledge was presented.

One of the main focuses of this strategy called “New building blocs of the North” which aims at an increased focus on development of economic opportunities, with emphasis on education environmental protection. One part of this strategy will be to establish programs across national borders in the region, for documentation of traditional knowledge in a Northern perspective. Another element will be establishment of a program for indigenous industry development based on their traditional culture.

A program for the development of ethical guidelines for industrial development in traditional indigenous areas of the North will also be an important part of this program.

Madame Chair,

The Arctic is a region characterized by close cooperation and the absence of conflict, an area of peace and stability. Our primary responsibility is to maintain this favorable situation.

However, profound changes are occurring. Today we know that climate change is taking place most rapidly and most visibly in the Arctic. It is one of the best places in the world to study its causes and dynamics. And it is this knowledge that will determine whether humanity will be able to address the challenges posed by climate change.

No-one feels the effect of this climate change more than the indigenous peoples living in this region. The changes are bringing new challenges to their traditional way of life. It is important that their knowledge and experience are respected and utilized when we all have to adapt to a changing climate.