

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Estonia, Sven Jürgenson at the 17th Session of the United Nations' Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Madam

Item 4

Ms. Chair, colleagues, distinguished representatives of the Indigenous peoples and organizations.

I would like to start by saying that the protection of the rights of indigenous people is a vital part of the Estonian human rights policy. We have a firm belief that indigenous peoples add to the diversity of the world and enrich our cultures. They possess unique languages, and cultural traditions that are irreplaceable elements of our roots and heritage.

The adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 11 years ago was a crucial step towards the recognition, promotion and protection of the rights and freedoms of indigenous peoples. Unfortunately, today, the world's indigenous peoples still face vast challenges. In several countries, fundamental rights, including economic, social and cultural rights, of the indigenous peoples are not respected. In particular, we are concerned over the rights to land and natural resources. However, I believe that our efforts in tackling these issues will shape the future of indigenous peoples, alongside with ours, for the better.

It is paramount that the international community and organizations do everything possible to support indigenous peoples. In this regard we are very pleased that this week the President of the General Assembly will conduct the informal interactive hearing on enhanced participation of indigenous peoples at the United Nations. As languages play a crucially important role in the daily lives of all peoples, with their complex implications for identity, cultural diversity, social integration, communication, education and development, we strongly welcome the Action Plan for organizing the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages developed by UNESCO and presented today at the Forum. Estonia is proud to be a member of the Steering Committee for its implementation.

The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples is a crucial element in supporting indigenous peoples' representatives and organisations, and so, Estonia remains its committed supporter and contributor. Estonia has also provided several experts to the Permanent Forum of the Indigenous Peoples and of course, remains highly passionate when working for the prosperity of Finno-Ugric Indigenous Peoples, the language family which Estonia itself belongs to. About twenty years ago Estonia launched its own Kindred Peoples' Programme to support cultural and educational activities among the Finno-Ugric peoples. An example that demonstrates its long-term success is the project called Finno-Ugric Capitals of Culture. On the 8th of April the Mari village of Šorunža was chosen as the capital of culture for the year 2019. We wish them much success with all their events.

Madam

Ms. Chair,

We must realize, that although the world has become a larger place for us in many ways, it cannot become a poorer place in terms of culture. Let us remember that the true wealth of the world lies within its diversity and preserving this legacy remains our common responsibility.

I wish you a fruitful continuation of the next two-week discussions.

I thank you.