

Finland

Check against delivery



**Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

**Item 6; Review of the Activities of the UN System; human rights**

Mr. Chairman, Indigenous and governmental representatives,  
Distinguished members of the Forum

- Protection and promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples is one of the priorities of Finland's human rights policy. The rights of indigenous peoples, which are often collective rights, are based on their special relationship to the land and natural resources of the area in which they live as the foundation for a distinctive culture and way of life. The primary concern of Finland in this area is to develop the living conditions of indigenous peoples in such a way as to allow the survival of their communities and cultures. Alongside civil and political rights it is also important to assist the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights equally with other citizens. Issues relating to land rights and the right to self-determination are particularly important to the preservation of culture and way of life of indigenous peoples.
- Tomorrow the Finnish Government discusses the Sami issues in the informal session of the Government, for the first time in the presence of the President of the Sami Parliament. On this historical occasion, the Government will lay down concrete lines to be followed in the Finnish Government's Sami rights policy.
- The Government of Finland has consistently been of the opinion that the Draft Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples would constitute a valuable supplement to the standards of international law on the subject of indigenous peoples. The opinion of the Finnish Government is that all efforts should be made for the adoption of the declaration as soon as possible, in any case during the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. Most of the articles of the draft declaration, including article 3, are acceptable to our Government, as originally drafted. There are, however, some articles which we would like to improve further, such as the provisions relating to linguistic rights. Our firm opinion is that the language is a vehicle of culture and identity of the indigenous peoples.
- Women and children are priority areas of the Finnish Human Rights Policy. When we look at these groups simultaneously and collectively, we recognize that indigenous women and children are often subjected to multiple discrimination. They may be affected, for example, by a double burden of gender and racial discrimination. Therefore, the rights of indigenous women and girls demand special attention.
- The establishment of the Permanent Forum fulfills one very essential task by giving the ownership of the indigenous issues to whom it belongs: to the indigenous peoples themselves. The Permanent Forum provides the place for the indigenous peoples to determine relevant issues by themselves and for themselves within the framework of the United Nations system. We trust the Forum will give valuable, forward-looking contributions within the scope of its developing and evolving mandate.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.