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S U O M I

F I N L A N D

**Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

**Fourth session**

**Item 3 (a)**

**Goal 1 of the Millennium Development Goals:  
"Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger"**

**Statement by Finland**

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*Government*

Madame Chairperson,

Let me first of all congratulate you on your election as the Chair of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. My government attaches great importance to the work of the Forum, and will continue to support it both politically and financially in the coming years.

Finland warmly welcomes the decision by the Forum to organise its work in 2005 and onwards around cross-cutting themes related to the Millennium Development Goals. Later this year, when assessing the progress made in achieving the MDGs, we must ensure that the situation and the needs of indigenous peoples are fully integrated in the deliberations. It is of paramount importance that the voices of indigenous peoples themselves are heard, and fully taken into account in the evaluation. A contribution by the Permanent Forum to the review process will therefore be highly valuable.

As has been highlighted in our discussion yesterday and this morning, indigenous peoples are disproportionately represented among the poorest of the poor in both developed and developing countries. Whilst the root causes of poverty are manifold, and may differ from one country to another, it is clear that discrimination and the lack of enjoyment of human rights continue to be major causes of poverty among indigenous peoples throughout the world.

Achieving full respect for the principle of non-discrimination is a broad task implicating all members of society. Education and awareness-raising about culture and traditions of indigenous peoples remain vital to this goal, since discrimination is often generated by lack of knowledge. Such promotional measures are not, however, sufficient by themselves. Anti-discrimination legislation, and effective means of enforcing such legislation, is of paramount importance for attaining the goal of equality, which in turn is essential for the eradication of poverty among the marginalised sectors of society.

Madame Chairperson,

The two themes examined during this session are closely interlinked. Lack of equal access to education is part of the multidimensional character of poverty also among indigenous peoples. Moreover, linguistic barriers continue to be one of the reasons for discrimination. As a part of our development cooperation policy, Finland has carried out intercultural bilingual projects to contribute to the expansion, strengthening and improvement of the quality of education among indigenous peoples especially in Central American and Andean region countries. The aim has been to consolidate the ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity and to consider gender and vulnerability aspects by prioritising indigenous women and children. Besides a question of human rights, education in the mother tongue is clearly also an instrument that helps to extend the benefits of primary education, and thus to achieve the MDGs.

Marginalisation and poverty may be the result of societal structures that cater primarily to the needs of the majority population, without giving sufficient attention to the particular needs that indigenous peoples may have. To a large extent, this results from the absence of members of indigenous peoples in the decision-making processes. In all efforts to reduce poverty, participation of those affected is of fundamental importance.

Regarding the MDGs, participation of indigenous peoples in the preparation and monitoring of national Poverty Reduction Strategies and in their implementation is clearly crucial, as has been pointed out by previous speakers. Donors can support the participation of representatives of indigenous peoples in international meetings and the preparatory processes at national level by funding indigenous organisations. Finland, for example, has funded several regional and national meetings in Central America and the participation of indigenous people in the preparatory process of the Indigenous Declaration of the OAS.

For the future, of critical importance is the long-term enhancement of the right of indigenous peoples to participate, on equal terms, in the general conduct of all public affairs. Special attention must be devoted to promoting the participation of indigenous women and youth in decision-making processes.

Thank you.