

— EMO9 Kuupik 009

10/12/09  
ITS

STATEMENT BY

**Mr. Kuupik Kleist**

**Premier of Greenland**

DELEGATION OF DENMARK

---

2ND SESSION OF THE EXPERT MECHANISM ON THE RIGHTS OF  
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES  
(GENEVA, 10-14 AUGUST, 2009)

GENEVA, 11 AUGUST, 2009

Check against Delivery

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Members of the Expert Mechanism, Indigenous Experts and State Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great honour for me to address this (the 2<sup>nd</sup>) Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - yet another important body to represent the interests of indigenous peoples at the international arena. Congratulations to all of you on your appointment as Experts to this Mechanism.

It is, indeed, a pleasure to register the huge development and rapid affirmation of indigenous rights throughout the UN system and, in particular, to experience an increasing number of indigenous experts in influential positions. The hard work and dedication finally seem to gradually bring about the results that we all have been striving for.

I have been looking forward to seeing you all again and found this an excellent opportunity to demonstrate our continued support.

Many of you will know that Greenland recently entered a new era after some years of internal deliberations followed by negotiations with Denmark. In a national referendum in Greenland on November 25, 2008, 75% of the Greenland people voted in favour of taking our self-government a step further. On June 2, 2009 in national parliamentary elections, the Greenland people voted to move forward with a new leadership, which I am proud to represent here.

All together we celebrated our new partnership with Denmark on our national day June 21, 2009. A partnership which is shaped by our historic relationship and further developed upon principles laid out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

3

Inspired and informed by internal needs and international processes, not least on indigenous rights, an all Greenland Commission on Self-Government in 2003 submitted a proposal for a renewed partnership with Denmark. On the basis of this work, the Premier of Greenland and the Danish Prime Minister on June 21, 2004 signed the terms of reference for a joint Greenland-Danish Commission on Self-Government. I had the honour to be a member of the Greenland-Danish Commission, which concluded its work on April 17, 2008.

Further details on historical background, content and results of this process have already been reported to the 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the Permanent Forum in May of this year.

My main message today is the fact that this new development in Greenland and in the relationship between Denmark and Greenland should be seen as a de facto implementation of the Declaration and, in this regard, hopefully an inspiration to others.

At the national level or at the level of the realm, the Act on Greenland Self-Government, indeed, operationalizes the rights affirmed in the Declaration as called for by Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, Professor James Anaya, in his excellent report to the (9<sup>th</sup> session of the) Human Rights Council last year.

I have studied the report with great interest, and can very well subscribe to Professor Anaya's excellent overall analysis and conclusion, in particular, on the importance of pursuing positive engagement and partnerships.

The new relationship between Denmark and Greenland primarily entails a further devolution of powers to Greenland. It is based on a partnership, which

now includes recognition of the Greenland people as a people under international law and thereby confirms our right to self-determination.

At the inauguration of Greenland Self-Government in Nuuk a few weeks ago, the Danish Prime Minister addressed this – to us - very important recognition in a most pragmatic and sober way stating that it would indeed be a natural thing for the government to inform the United Nations of Greenland's new status.

A status, which, in addition to our recognition as a people under international law, also includes the recognition of Greenlandic as the official language and Greenland's ownership and control of all natural resources.

My own response to the overwhelmingly positive reaction from both Denmark and abroad, these past few weeks, is that - naturally neither the transformation from Home Rule to Self-Government nor the full implementation of the declaration will happen over night. This is only the beginning and we are acutely aware that our new status also brings with it huge obligations and challenges - financially and politically - for Greenland. However, we are ready to take on greater responsibility, which always comes with rights.

“There are simply no free lunches,” as they say. Rather, hard work lies ahead in order for us to fully exercise our additional powers and to ensure economic sustainability. First and foremost, we have to promote and ensure the education and training of our people.

I am therefore pleased that the right of indigenous peoples to education is an important theme at this session under the umbrella of implementation of the Declaration, even though education is also one of the mandated areas of the Permanent Forum and, indeed, falls under the broad mandate of the Special

Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people.

The rights aspect is an important one. How do we ensure that our peoples are able to exercise their right to education?

In Greenland, we control our own educational system and have done so for some time. Our educational system is free and open to all. We have education and training in our own language. Yet, we still struggle to increase the level of education at a sufficient pace to cover our need for educated people.

We have created several institutions of higher education to allow our students to study in Greenland instead of having to move abroad. We have made several educational reforms to adjust the educational system to our special needs and to ensure the teaching in Greenlandic. However, we have also listened to our students wanting their education to be compatible with similar education in Denmark, the Nordic countries and elsewhere to give them the necessary flexibility in their lives. My government shares the need for a global outlook.

We have a huge obligation to ensure that our children and youth are provided the necessary educational and occupational opportunities in a socially and culturally sensible and sound environment which will allow them to prosper and take on responsibilities for the future of our country.

We will continue to invest heavily in education to maximize the benefit in terms of output. It is a challenge and a balancing act, in our educational system, to sustain our indigenous language and cultural heritage and at the same time ensure that our students obtain the professional skills and capacities of the world

surrounding us. Our small number of people dispersed in a huge territory with a rather difficult infrastructure makes it extremely hard to reach out to everyone.

We know that we must succeed and we are very interested to learn from others in this area as to how we can best implement this right and ensure the best results for all parties.

Turning back to the implementation issue in the broader perspective, my old friend and colleague Aqqaluk Lyngé, President of ICC-Greenland, has pointed to the fact that we need to start implementing the Declaration internally in Greenland. I agree with him on that point. The Declaration has been endorsed by both Government and Parliament of Greenland and it has raised expectations of citizens and interest groups. We need to take a closer look at our own compliance with this important (human) rights instrument. To guide and monitor our efficiency in this regard, our Parliament last year made an agreement in principle to establish a national centre for human rights in Greenland, a goal which I hope we will soon be able to fulfil.

When we take over jurisdiction from Denmark - such as over natural resources - we must carefully examine the potential impact on our local communities, hunters, fishermen and the environment. We do need to take advantage of opportunities for economic development, also based on non-renewable resources, to sustain ourselves in the future, but not at any cost.

Together with Denmark, Greenland took active part in the long and difficult negotiations leading to the adoption of the Declaration both to protect our own rights and in support of indigenous peoples around the world. Greenland also helped pave the way for the establishment of the Permanent Forum and this mechanism, which together with the important mandate of the Special

Rapporteur form an impressive body of expertise and powers to contribute to the strengthening of the world order based on solidarity between all peoples.

It would appear that relationships and issues ripen with time and effort – and the more we share our experiences the further we are able to take the results.

We celebrate our new status and new partnership with Denmark with the clear understanding that the transformation was neither happening in isolation from our joint international struggle for the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples. Nor will our experience automatically work with respect to solving problems elsewhere.

We do believe, however, that sharing positive examples and best practices is important. Together with the ongoing work of various UN forums and international and regional and local organisations, it contributes to the forging of new relationships between states and indigenous peoples. In the Arctic Council context, for example, we were able to use the positive momentum during a ministerial meeting in Nuuk, some years back, to achieve Permanent Participant status and seats at the table for our Arctic indigenous organizations.

In this regard, we applaud Denmark and like-minded countries for being at the forefront of the global community as promoters of the protection of human rights and indigenous peoples' right to political recognition.

I can also assure you of Greenland's continued commitment to supporting the constructive cooperation between various parties, be it UN or elsewhere. We pledge to work jointly with all parties towards the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Programme of Action

for the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People – with its highly relevant title - “Partnership for Action and Dignity.”

Qujanaq - Thank you for your attention