



PERMANENT MISSION OF FINLAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS
866 UN PLAZA, SUITE 222, NEW YORK, NY 10017 - TEL. 1-212-355-2100 - FAX 1-212-759-6156

STATEMENT BY

H.E. Mr. Jarmo Viinanen

Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations

Item 3: Discussion on the special theme for the year: "Indigenous peoples: development with culture and identity: articles 3 and 32 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples"

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Ninth Session

United Nations, New York

20 April, 2010

[Mr] Chairperson,

Distinguished members of the Permanent Forum,

Honorable delegates and participants of the Ninth Session,

The Delegation of Finland is pleased to address the theme for this year's session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues: development with culture and identity in the light of articles 3 and 32 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

For Finland, the objective both domestically and internationally is to facilitate development that allows communities and cultures to survive and develop on their own terms. We are firm believers in non-discrimination. At the same time, we emphasize the need for special measures to protect the rights of those groups in society, which are at the greatest risk of becoming victims of direct or indirect discrimination. The international development cooperation, in which Finland engages, is guided by a rights based approach. We have chosen such an approach not only because it reflects our political ideals but also because we find it most practical in making development work. The rights of indigenous peoples are a cross-cutting theme in Finland's development policy.

For Finland, the establishment of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2002 was a key mile stone in giving the indigenous peoples of the world a voice at the international level. We salute the fact that this institution has been able to establish itself as the most important international forum for cooperation among indigenous peoples and for interaction between them and governments. Finland was among those states most committed to the creation of the Permanent Forum, and will continue to support it both financially and politically to strengthen its authority and influence in the UN system.

[Mr] Chairperson,

For Finland, the future of the Arctic Region is of paramount importance. We emphasize the right of those living in the Region to a future that allows them to preserve their cultures and livelihoods and to develop them on their own terms. We see the Arctic Council as the most important cooperation forum in this respect. It is the only intergovernmental organisation covering the entire Arctic Region in whose activities indigenous peoples participate and which they have a right to address. The impact of climate change is already being felt in the Region,

and is likely to alter dramatically the living conditions to which life – humans, animals, plants – have adapted.

We are pleased to note that the Permanent Forum will pay attention to the situation in the Arctic Region also during this session. The realisation of Article 32 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in that Region relies on how effectively the indigenous peoples, other inhabitants of the Region, and governments can act together with each other, and together with the rest of the world, to counter and limit the adverse effects of climate change, and devise means by which indigenous cultures – livelihoods, languages, religions, traditions - can continue to thrive in the Region in spite of the drastic changes in their environment.

[Mr] Chairperson,

The status of the Sámi as an indigenous people was recognized in the Constitution of Finland in 1995. According to the Constitution, the Sámi, as an indigenous people, have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. The word “culture” has a broad meaning in this context and thus covers also the traditional livelihoods of the Sámi, such as reindeer herding, fishing and hunting. Moreover, the Constitution of Finland safeguards the Sámi people’s linguistic and cultural self-government within the Sámi Homeland area.

Maybe the most significant way for the Sámi to participate into societal decision-making processes lies, however, on the statutory obligation set out in the Act on the Sámi Parliament to authorities to negotiate with the Sámi Parliament in various issues. According to the Act (Section 9) the authorities shall negotiate with the Sámi Parliament in all far-reaching and important measures which may directly and specifically affect the status of the Sámi as an indigenous people and which concern matters in the Sámi Homeland as referred to in the Act.

[These matters are:

- Community planning;
- The management, use, leasing and assignment of state lands, conservation areas and wilderness areas;
- Applications for licenses to stake mine claims of file mining patents;

- Legislative or administrative changes to the occupations belonging to the Sámi culture;
- The development of the teaching of and in the Sámi language in schools, as well as social and health services; or
- Any other matters affecting the Sámi language and culture and the status of the Sámi as an indigenous people.]

The obligation to negotiate applies to a wide range of issues. To fulfil its obligation to negotiate, the relevant authority shall provide the Sámi Parliament with the opportunity to be heard and to discuss the matters. The obligation to negotiate applies to all levels of administration, in other words, to local, regional and nationwide authorities.

For the Sámi in Finland, language is a key element of the Sámi identity. In this regard, great challenges remain, inter alia, when it comes to the provision of education and day care in the Sámi languages. This has been recognized by the Government and work is underway to address this issue.

Making the self-government achieve its aims in practice requires constant attention. Finland remains committed to developing national and international decision-making processes in accordance with the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples in such a way that the full and effective participation of the Sámi is assured in decision-making processes that affect them.

Thank you, [Mr] Chairperson]