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**Human Rights Council**

**Statement by Finland on behalf of the Nordic countries and Estonia on the occasion of the presentation of the Report of the Working Group on the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 27 June 2006**

Mr President,

I have the honour to address the Human Rights Council on behalf of the Nordic countries - in addition to my own country Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, as well as Estonia. I would also like to express our support to the statement made earlier by Austria on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. President, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Chairman-Rapporteur for his leadership in this important process.

The first international decade of the world's indigenous peoples, which was initiated by the world conference on Human Rights in 1993, had two major goals: to finalise a UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, and to establish a permanent forum for indigenous issues within the UN system.

We did succeed in establishing the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues, which was a major achievement of the first decade. The Nordic countries are pleased that after many years of intense negotiations, we have now also finalised the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

In its 5<sup>th</sup> Session in May 2006, the Permanent Forum underlined that a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples will be an instrument of great value to advance the rights and aspirations of the world's indigenous peoples, and therefore recommended the adoption without amendments of the draft Declaration. The Nordic countries fully support this recommendation.

As is obvious from the long lasting negotiations between the governments and representatives of indigenous peoples in the Working Group, the task of reaching the conclusion was not easy, and at times compromises had to be made to reach an end result. All the parties to the negotiations participated with keen interest, open mind and willingness to reach the goal for the enhancement of the situation of indigenous peoples around the world. No party to the negotiations can claim that the result is perfect. In our opinion, however, this is the best compromise that realistically could be reached. A wide range of problems was solved for the first time in history and awareness raising was being brought to a new level due to the work of this Working Group.

*As well as the Nordic Sami Parliaments and the Greenland home govern.*

It is of utmost importance that the result, the draft declaration, is now adopted by the Human Rights Council. We fear that any deferral of the process would risk to jeopardize the achievements of the process, and the Declaration altogether. The work of hundreds of government's and indigenous peoples' representatives should be honored and the process, that started over 10 years ago, be brought to a honorable and meaningful end.

Mr President,

The rights of indigenous peoples are of utmost importance to the Nordic Countries. This issue affects the lives of, not only the indigenous peoples in our countries, but the population as a whole. We view the draft Declaration as an important tool in underscoring the principle of full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in decision-making processes. The adoption of the draft Declaration will in our view strengthen the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples worldwide. Once the draft Declaration is adopted, it can serve as a comprehensive framework for partnership between states

and indigenous peoples. The Declaration is first and foremost a political document setting a standard of achievement to be pursued in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect.

Mr President,

In the September Summit, the heads of our States or Governments reaffirmed the commitment to continue making progress in the advancement of the human rights of the world's indigenous peoples. The Nordic Countries emphasise the importance for the Human Rights Council to live up to this commitment. It is important that whenever the rights of indigenous peoples are being addressed by the Council, indigenous peoples and organisations are able to participate actively in the process. This is the only way the Council can make informed decisions, rooted in the day-to-day reality of the indigenous peoples.