



## STATEMENT BY FINLAND

Mr. Chairman,

The protection and promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples is one of the priorities of Finnish human rights policy. As a country with an indigenous population, Finland is, in its international policies, guided by the experiences gained at home. Our national policies and legislation, at the same time, are influenced by international developments and of course conducted in accordance with the international obligations undertaken by the government. In the following, Mr. Chairman, I would like to give some practical examples of this interaction between national and international fora, focusing on a couple of themes of particular importance for this Forum.

Firstly, in our view, the rights of indigenous peoples need to be seen in the context of their special relationship to the land and natural resources of the area on which they live. This relationship forms the foundation for a distinctive culture and way of life. For the survival of indigenous communities and the preservation of traditional livelihoods, the right to self-determination and issues relating to land rights are therefore particularly important.

These principles are reflected in our national constitution, which guarantees the Sami, as an indigenous people, the right to maintain and develop their language and culture. The Sami culture, in this context, is understood as comprising traditional forms of livelihood such as reindeer herding, fishing and hunting. The Sami language, on the other hand, has the status of a regional minority language, which enables the Sami to use their own language before public authorities, in public services, and in education. A revised Sami language act is currently under preparation.

A reflection of our national experiences can be seen in our work at the Working group on the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, where we have sought to improve further the provisions relating to linguistic rights. Overall, we see the draft declaration as a valuable tool for the promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples, and believe that all efforts should be made to adopt it as soon as possible. Most of the articles of the draft declaration, including article 3 relating to self-determination, are acceptable to our government, as originally drafted.

Another amendment Finland has proposed to the draft declaration is the inclusion of a special article on the rights of indigenous children. This is a reflection of the emphasis given to the rights of the child in our human rights policy and an acknowledgement of the international commitments undertaken. At the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on children a year ago, governments committed themselves to ensuring the rights of *all* children, while at the same time recognising that indigenous children are disproportionately disadvantaged. Especially indigenous girls often suffer multiple discrimination.

Sustainable development, based on the mutually reinforcing pillars of economic development, social development and environmental protection, is also crucial for the preservation of the culture of indigenous peoples. Based on this conviction, Finland chose indigenous issues as one of its areas of emphasis at the WSSD in Johannesburg last year. We view the outcome of the Summit as a positive signal of the increasing emphasis given to the rights of indigenous peoples in various international fora, and the growing understanding of the collective nature of these rights.

The WSSD also served to highlight the close connections between the six mandated areas of this Forum, all of which were one way or another touched upon also at Johannesburg. These interlinkages have been in evidence in this room over the past days as well - proving yet again the wisdom behind the broad mandate given to this Forum. It is our belief that the Forum will give valuable input to the UN system on the whole range of its mandate - "energizing the UN system", as the High Commissioner for Human Rights put it in his statement - while applying a human rights perspective in all its considerations.