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**Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
Third session  
Item 4 (e) Culture**

STATEMENT

BY

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STATE SECRETARY  
MINISTRY  
OF  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

NEW YORK, 13 MAY 2004

Statement

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Mr. Chair,

We welcome this opportunity to discuss culture, which is an important part of the mandate of the Permanent Forum. Democracy, pluralism and decentralisation in cultural life are key elements in Norway's cultural policy. One of the aims of our cultural policy is to promote cultural identity in a multicultural society. Special attention is given to the Sami culture. In order to promote stronger Sami influence and greater decision-making authority in matters that particularly concern the Sami population, the Sami Parliament today has responsibility for distributing grants for cultural and linguistic purposes, and responsibility for cultural tasks that are particularly important for Sami culture.

The Government and the Sami Parliament share the view that promoting the Sami language is of crucial importance in our common efforts to safeguard the Sami culture.

All pupils in primary and lower secondary schools in Sami districts, are entitled to study and be taught in the Sami language. Sami pupils have an individual right to study the Sami language all over the country. Increased local freedom to decide the content in the curricula at primary and secondary school, gives the possibility to adapt the teaching to local conditions. This is important particularly to the Sami pupils.

Last year the Permanent Forum recommended that Governments introduce indigenous languages in public administration in indigenous territories where feasible. According to Norwegian legislation, Sami and Norwegian are languages of equal status in the areas where the Sami Language Act applies. In this area, any person who contacts a local public body, has the right to receive a reply in Sami. The Act also guarantees an extended right to use Sami in the legal system and in the health and welfare sectors.

Mr. Chair

Our objective is that Sami language should be used more in public arenas as in media, education, health and welfare services, etc. We also stress the importance of using Sami, as the original language, in Sami research and science.

Mr. Chair,

Allow me also to emphasize the importance we attach to the Sami library service and the Sami museums in our efforts to promote Sami culture. However, there are still financial challenges ahead to reach our goals.

Sami media play a vital role in our efforts to safeguard and develop Sami society, language and culture. The importance of diversity in the Sami media should be emphasized.

Mr. Chair,

Safeguarding and promotion of the Sami culture is a high priority for the Government as well as the Sami Parliament. Although we have achieved a lot over the past decades, we are still faced with great challenges. Preservation and promotion of Sami culture will, therefore, continue to be high on our agenda, and we will do our best to implement our ambitions.

Thank you.