

UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Eighth Session, New York, 18 – 29 May 2009

Statement by the State Secretary Raimo Valle, Ministry of Labour and Social
Inclusion

Item 4 A:

Implementation of the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Madam Chair,

It's an honour to address the Permanent Forum on behalf of the Norwegian Government and report on some recent developments when it comes to Sami Policy in Norway. I want to thank the Forum for visiting the Sami Parliament and Norway for your pre-sessional meeting.

The Government submitted to the Norwegian Parliament a white paper on policies towards the Sami in May 2008. The key focus is how all levels of public administration implement the Sami perspective in policy-making. Agencies working within different areas are obliged to systematic planning regarding Sami rights. In addition, they are obliged to report on the actual implementation. This gives the different ministries the opportunity to adjust policies. Close cooperation with the Sami Parliament is of course essential.

At the regional level in traditional Sami areas there are now voluntary agreements on cooperation between the Sami Parliament and the county councils covering the responsibilities of the regional level. In the white paper mentioned, we have expressed concerns about the Samis not enjoying their rights at the municipal level in many districts. Cooperation between the Norwegian association of local and regional authorities, the Sami Parliament and the Government has been established in order to identify ways to improve this situation.

In the UN Declaration the principle of consultation is reflected in article 19. Consultations between state authorities and the Sami Parliament in Norway are conducted according to an

agreement on *Procedures for consultations* between the Government and The Sami Parliament.

Madam Chair, the obligation to consult the Sami Parliament is an important element in this systematic discussion on implementation of Sami rights in Norway.

In 2008, several consultations were held between the Sami Parliament and the Government concerning the Nature Diversity Act. Both the Government and the Sami Parliament were satisfied with the process and the result. During the consultation process, the Sami Parliament got acceptance for many of their claims.

An important achievement in 2008, also after consultations with the Sami Parliament, is that we have two Sami newspapers in Norway which are published 5 days a week. One of them is in Sami language and the other in the Norwegian language. This is important from both a democratic point of view and from a language development perspective.

Language rights are an important aspect of UN declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The government aims at presenting an action plan on Sami languages later this month. The action plan has been developed in close dialogue with the Sami Parliament. The aim is to take steps in various sectors in order to ensure that Sami languages (North-, Lule- and South Sami languages) will be languages in current use in Norway.

In most consultation processes state authorities and the Sami Parliament find a common solution, but sometimes it is not possible to reach a full agreement. One example of this is the consultations on a new mineral act.

Consultations concerning the Act took place in the period of 2007 – 2008 between the Government, The Sami Parliament, and the Sami Reindeer Herder's Association of Norway. However, an agreement between the parties could not be reached. Consultations on the topic have therefore been concluded.

The Proposition to the Norwegian Parliament was submitted earlier this spring. The view of the Sami Parliament is reflected in the Proposition, so that the Norwegian Parliament can take the Sami positions into consideration before adopting the Act.

This demonstrates that consultations differ from case to case, and that we still have challenges.

To conclude, I will once again underline what I consider as important elements when it comes to implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It is essential to integrate the Sami perspective in all levels of public administration, including regional and local level. Special measures in order to protect and develop Sami culture shall be carried out in cooperation with the Sami Parliament, and the Sami Parliament must be consulted before adopting and implementing measures that may affect the Sami people.

I will also take this opportunity to reiterate my Government's invitation for the Special Rapporteur to visit Norway in order to study the situation for our Sami people.

The full version of my statement will be posted on the Permanent Forum's website.

I thank you for your attention.