

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

The 7th session

Agenda Item 4.1 - Implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Statement by the Arctic Indigenous Caucus

Thank you Mdm Chairperson,

The implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is particularly critical with regard to the most paramount right enshrined in the Declaration - that of self-determination. The Declaration's affirmation of developments within international law implying that also non-state forming peoples enjoy the right to self-determination constitutes a fundamental achievement in indigenous peoples' struggle for recognition of our rights. At the same time, one must be humble before the great challenges ahead of us when it comes to the implementation of the right to self-determination, as it applies to indigenous peoples. There is little experience with operationalizing the right to self-determination when two or more peoples share the same state, or when a people's territory stretches over more than one state, as is the case with the Inuit and Saami. Yet, finding workable mechanisms and other solutions that respect that indigenous peoples have a right to self-determination equal to that of state-forming peoples and that also adequately operationalize this right is an absolute pre-requisite for an effective implementation of the UN Indigenous Declaration.

Therefore, the Arctic Caucus recommends that the Permanent Forum has self-determination as the theme next year. We further recommend that the annual UN Expert Meeting the Permanent Forum regularly convenes also be devoted to self-determination, to prepare for the Permanent Forum session.

But the implementation of the Declaration is of course first and foremost the responsibility of states. To further a dialogue that contributes to the implementation of the Declaration in the Arctic region, the Arctic Indigenous Caucus poses the following questions to the states, which we humbly ask you to respond to at the Permanent Forum session:

Canada

1. The majority of the members of the Canadian parliament support the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Will the Canadian government respond to this call and change its position and support the Declaration, containing rights fundamental to the Inuit and other indigenous peoples of Canada.

Denmark

1. Denmark has previously reported on two major commission work in progress; the Greenland Judicial Commission and the Joint Commission on Self-governance. Can Denmark provide an update on the status of the work in these commissions.

Finland

1. Finland has recently attracted international criticism for allowing clear cutting of forests fundamental to Saami reindeer husbandry. Is Finland going to stop deforestation of Saami traditional grazing lands?

2. A lot of the problems caused to Saami reindeer herders are a result of reindeer husbandry not being a sole right of the Saami in Finland. Will Finland change its policy and render reindeer husbandry a sole right of the Saami people?

Norway

1. In Norway, much focus is on the Saami people's right to share in profits from oil, gas and mineral extraction. No such benefit-sharing has so far taken place. Will Norway change policy, and recognize the Saami people's right to share such profits?

2. The Saami are also awaiting the promised follow up by the Norwegian government on the obligations of consultations between the Saami parliament and state authorities with regard to the budget process. When will Norwegian government enter into an agreement with the Saami parliament also with regard to the budget process?

The Russian Federation

1. Also in Russia, a lot of extractive industry activities are taking place or being planned in indigenous territories. Will the Russian Federation enact legislation that

safeguards Inuit, Saami and other indigenous peoples' right to their traditional land based activities, against competing industrial projects?

Sweden

1. In its most recent human rights report to the Swedish parliament, the Swedish government has deleted the reference to its ambition to ratify ILO Convention No. 169. Does this mean that Sweden no longer intends to ratify ILO 169?

Norway, Finland and Sweden

1. These countries have deferred action to ratify the Nordic Saami Convention. When will these countries ratify the Convention?

The United States

1. The UN Committee on Racial Discrimination has just called on the United States to respect and implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Are the United States going to respond to this call?

Thank you, Mdm Chairperson.