

STATEMENT OF THE ARCTIC REGION
Inuit Circumpolar Council and Sami Council

The Indigenous peoples of the Arctic today celebrate the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples!* The Inuit Circumpolar Council and Sami Council welcome this momentous occasion. For the first time, the world community has proclaimed a universally applicable human rights instrument in order to end centuries of marginalisation and discrimination, and to affirm that Indigenous peoples are peoples, equal in dignity and rights with all other peoples.

Arctic Indigenous peoples particularly welcome the fact that the Declaration recognizes our unqualified right of self-determination. It is through the exercise and enjoyment of this right that we have and will continue to freely determine our political status and freely pursue our economic, social and cultural development, including our right to own and control our natural resources in our traditional territories. The Declaration also affirms our right to strengthen our distinct political, legal, and economic institutions. For peoples in the Arctic, we understand this to mean that States are obligated to work directly with our political institutions, such as the Greenland Home Rule Government and the Saami Parliaments, as well as assist us in the strengthening of our economic and cultural structures, such as reindeer herding, hunting, fishing, and whaling.

Furthermore, we would like to underscore the Declaration provisions that recognize our right to own, use and control the lands, territories and natural resources that we have traditionally occupied. Therefore, States can no longer assume that our territories are solely the property of the State. Rather, States must respect and recognize our unequivocal rights, including ownership, to such lands, territories and resources. In addition, the territories of indigenous peoples in the Arctic can no longer be used for industrial or other activities without the free, prior and informed consent of our peoples. These provisions establish the necessary foundation for sustainable and equitable development in the Arctic and will ensure that Indigenous peoples in the Arctic directly benefit from such resource use.

In addition, we want to highlight the Declaration provisions that affirm our right to redress, especially in the context of lands, territories and natural resources taken without our consent. Arctic Indigenous peoples now expect respective States throughout the North to initiate processes by which lands taken during the colonisation of the Arctic are returned to their rightful Indigenous owners.

We also note that this new universal Declaration goes much further than other Indigenous human rights instruments through its comprehensive recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples, including ILO Convention No. 169, the proposed Nordic Saami Convention and the current draft of the Proposed American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. With the adoption of the UN Declaration, as an affirmative statement of the minimum, international standards for the recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples, all States and in particular, Arctic-rim States, must take immediate measures to adopt and implement ILO Convention No. 169 and the Saami Convention. In addition, the States throughout the Americas should be guided by these minimum standards and take urgent actions to uplift the language being considered by the Organization of American States.

In conclusion, the indigenous peoples of the Arctic today celebrate the historic event of the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Tomorrow, we look forward to commencing the work to effectively implement the UN Declaration in partnership with the peoples with whom we presently share our traditional territories with as well as the relevant States.