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MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN  
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**Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples  
Fifth Session, 9-13 July 2012  
Item 5**

**Statement by the Government of Finland  
10 July 2012**

Mr. Chairman [Madam Chairperson], members of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and participants of the fifth session,

My delegation is pleased to address the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Let me begin by expressing our appreciation to the Expert Mechanism for the valuable work it continuously delivers.

In Finland, we will be studying with great interest the Expert Mechanism's new thematic study on the role of languages and culture in the promotion and protection of the rights and identity of indigenous peoples. We welcome the Expert Mechanism's methodology to build its work upon its previous studies on the indigenous peoples' right to education and the right to participate in decision-making.

Language is one of the cornerstones of the culture and identity of indigenous peoples. Language provides the most efficient means of transmitting traditional knowledge and culture to next generations. Languages are a sign of the vitality of culture and cultural diversity. Therefore, the disappearance of any indigenous or minority language also represents an irrecoverable loss of cultural wealth and common cultural heritage.

We subscribe to the Expert Mechanism's view that *"the protection and promotion of indigenous peoples' languages and cultures requires States to recognize them in their constitutions, laws and policies"*.

According to the Constitution of Finland, the Sámi – as an indigenous people – have a right to maintain and develop their own language and culture.

Furthermore, the Act on the Sámi Parliament guarantees the cultural autonomy of the Sámi in respect to their language and culture. The obligation to negotiate with the Sámi Parliament applies to all levels of administration in all far-reaching and important measures which may directly and specifically affect the status of the Sámi as an indigenous people and which concern matters in the Sámi homeland – (as referred to in the Act).

The Sámi Language Act affirms that Sami people have the right to use the Sámi language in their relations with authorities, and in certain administrative and legal procedures within the Sámi homeland.

The UN Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples emphasizes the indigenous peoples' right to revitalize, use and develop their languages and to transmit them to future generations. Finland pursues the objectives of the Declaration by means of a national programme for the revival of the Sámi language. The programme is intended to create a permanent operating model for revitalizing all three Sámi languages spoken in Finland. The programme will focus on education, day care, teaching, social welfare and health care services, culture and the media.

In Finland, we have taken many measures to strengthen opportunities for education in Sámi. And, we are happy that the particular language nest activities for younger children have provided encouraging results. In addition, the social welfare and health services provided to the Sámi in their own language have been developed over the past decade.

We are also proud of the Sámi Cultural Centre, SAJOS, inaugurated in April this year, which is a new centre of Sámi culture and administration in Finland.

However, in Finland, as in many other countries, the revitalization of indigenous languages calls for further measures. Out of three Sámi languages spoken in Finland, both Skolt Sámi and Inari Sámi are spoken today only by few hundred people, and these languages are truly on the verge of extinction.

The growing urbanization of indigenous peoples is a particularly challenging trend for the survival of their languages. In Finland, over 60 % of the Sámi people live outside their Sámi Homeland. The right of the Sámi to their language and culture – guaranteed by the Constitution – nevertheless applies to the Sámi residing outside the Sámi Homeland.

We appreciate hearing the views of experts on good practices in revitalizing the indigenous languages in different social contexts. In particular, how best to address the challenges brought by the urbanization of indigenous peoples and the mixture of traditional and mainstream cultures, including livelihoods?

I would like to conclude by expressing Finland's support to the Expert Mechanism's mandate to provide the Human Rights Council with thematic advice, in the form of studies and research, on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Thank you for your attention.

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