

## **THE PERMANENT FORUM FOR INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

**Statement by the Saami Council, presented by Ms. Ravna Nystad**



### **Agenda Item 6; Economic and Social Development**

**New York, May 14, 2002**

Thank you Mr. Chairperson, for allowing me to address the floor during this the historic first session of the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues. [First in Saami then in the English language]. My name is Ravna Nystad and I speak on behalf of the Saami Council, an organization for the indigenous Saami people in Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. My organization regards the establishment of the Permanent Forum as an opportunity to finally adequately address the needs and concerns of all the world's indigenous peoples. Since it is the first time that my organization takes the floor, allow me also to congratulate you to the appointment as Chairperson for this extremely important body.

Social development for our point of view is that you can communicate with the society you belong to. Language is not just words that come out of our mouth, it is codes, how we understand the world around us, and how we can express our inner feelings. Language and knowledge walks hand in hand. It is not enough that our children learn the language at home, they have to hear it and get acceptance and respect for it in the majority society as well, otherwise they will see no use for it nor the value of their mother tongue, and indeed in the indigenous culture they belong to. If the indigenous societies shall have a positive development, majority society has to show respect and recognize to the value of the indigenous languages.

We have to realize that our children and youth use media as a source for information and entertainment. The society and the governments have to acknowledge that in order for the indigenous children to maintain his or her language, they must have a positive development, growing in to the society that they belong to. Otherwise the indigenous youth will fall between two chairs, they will belong to neither of the two societies.

Mister Chairperson, allow us here to refer to Article 17 of the Convention on the Rights of Child, which declares that all state parties shall encourage the mass media to take particular regard to the linguistic needs of indigenous children. The media in several countries – including some Nordic countries – fail to meet the demands in Article 17.

Saami Council proposes that UNESCO conducts a study on indigenous children and youth, on their social and economical development, e.g. main challenges indigenous children and youth are facing in their home countries.

We recognize that the Permanent Forum during its first years of existence has many important matters to deal with, including the establishment of its own secretariat, but we expect the Permanent Forum in the years to come to address this issue, since it is fundamental for preserving and developing the various indigenous cultures.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.