

Item 7 - Future work of the Permanent Forum, including issues considered by the Economic and Social Council and emerging issues, specifically challenges related to pandemics and responses to them

Statement by Ms. Aili Keskitalo, president of the Sámi Parliament in Norway
Wednesday 21. April 2021

Giitu ságadoalli. Thank you, Madam/Mr Chair.

I am speaking as the president of the Sámi Parliament in Norway, and the Sámi Parliamentary Council. This statement is also supported by the Saami Council.

It is a pleasure for me to greet you all from Sápmi, the homeland of the Sámi people. The Sámi and the Inuit are the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic socio-cultural region in the Permanent Forum.

Indigenous Peoples all over the world face severe challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. UN member states and the international community must strengthen their efforts to protect Indigenous Peoples, including our right to health care, and participation by Indigenous peoples in decision-making in matters that affect us.

The Sámi people are struggling with the consequences of covid-19. Our territories are divided by the borders of four states. Due to the pandemic, border traffic has been restricted since March 2020. Restrictions have had a significant impact on the Sámi society. It has affected our economic, social and cultural life. Family and social relations have been strongly disrupted, and this have especially affected our children, youth and elders.

Insufficient information about the pandemic in Indigenous languages could cause serious health risks, as a person can spread the virus against their will. This is a paradox after the International Year of Indigenous Languages, but it is also a confirmation of the need for an International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

Our recommendation is that the states with borders crossing Indigenous Peoples homelands must coordinate and harmonise pandemic regulations and restrictions.

Thank you for your attention! Ollu giitu!