

13th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP)

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I have the honor to make this statement on behalf of a group of states belonging to the region: Canada, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, and my own country Denmark together with Greenland.

We wish to thank EMRIP for initiating this regional meeting. Your innovative thinking has allowed us to continue the discussions on the rights of indigenous peoples despite the ongoing pandemic; a circumstance that makes it extremely difficult to facilitate international dialogue – while at the same time making it even more important. We therefore welcome today's regional meeting as well as its topic: "The impact of COVID-19 on the rights of indigenous peoples under the UNDRIP".

As we all know, COVID-19 has had a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of indigenous peoples around the world. Even before the pandemic, indigenous peoples experienced poorer access to health services and care, and significantly higher rates of diseases. As stated in article 24 of the UNDRIP, "indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health". However, the disproportionate effects of the pandemic have made it clear to all that we still have much work to do in implementing this article. This of course goes beyond the immediate context of health services, as indigenous peoples also experience the effects of food insecurities and malnutrition, poor access to sanitation, lack of clean water, violence against women and girls, as well as stigma and discrimination against indigenous peoples in a broader context. The pandemic has amplified preexisting human rights challenges for indigenous peoples, thus affecting them disproportionately in many ways.

Even more disturbing are the reports, amongst others from NGO's and the Special Rapporteur, of the abuse of certain States' special measures put in place during COVID-19. This includes examples of militarization of indigenous peoples' land during states of emergency, and of unlawful denial of

indigenous peoples' right of peaceful assembly under the pretext of enforcing COVID-19 security measures. It goes without saying that the rights set out in international human rights law and UNDRIP should also be respected during the pandemic and that COVID-19 should in no way be misused as an excuse to bypass, for instance, the right to land or the right to self-determination. To the contrary, we have heard examples of initiatives being developed in accordance with indigenous peoples' right to self-determination. This approach has empowered indigenous communities to be more resilient against the pandemic, as it has allowed them to put in place the measures that are most fitting for their specific situation in tackling COVID-19.

The States behind this statement reiterate our efforts and commitment to achieve the ends of the UNDRIP. We look forward to hearing the testimonies of indigenous peoples as well as the best practices from other states. It must be our common goal to ensure that the effects which COVID-19 is currently having on the rights of indigenous peoples will be as limited as possible, in both time and scope.

Thank you.