

THE PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Statement by the Saami Council, presented by Ms. Kristina Nordling
Agenda Item 6; Human Rights

First Session

New York, 16 May, 2002



Thank you Mr. Chairperson,

I speak on behalf of the Saami Council. Even though my organization has chosen to address the floor on the thematic issue "Human Rights", the topic we want to highlight goes beyond that of human rights. Actually, this statement could have been presented under any thematic issue.

The Saami Council - in chorus with almost all other indigenous organizations - has repeatedly underlined that the recognition of indigenous peoples' right to self-determination is the key element not only for achieving respect for our basic human rights and fundamental freedoms, but also in lifting indigenous peoples out of poverty, in putting an end to the destruction of our lands and waters, in providing our children with relevant education and so on.

Mr. Chairperson,

If any evidence is needed about the fact that the recognition of indigenous peoples' right to self-determination is a prerequisite for improving the life-situation of indigenous peoples, please acknowledge that several indigenous representatives have stressed the importance of self-determination on every thematic issue addressed during the last days debate. Indigenous peoples have reiterated that only indigenous peoples can be the care-takers of indigenous land and resources, that only indigenous peoples can provide adequate medical care to our sick, and that only indigenous peoples can address the particular concerns and needs of indigenous children.

Consequently, it is not possible to adequately address any thematic issue within the Permanent Forum's mandate, if not having as a basis for such discussions, an understanding of the importance of indigenous peoples' right to self-determination.

The Saami Council therefore recommends that the question of self-determination is adequately addressed as a separate agenda item at the next session of the Permanent Forum.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.