



NORDIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE  
INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

STATEMENT BY JENS BRØSTED,  
NORDIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

BEFORE THE  
UN NATIONS WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS  
at the 11th session, July 1993

Madam Chairman, allow me to congratulate you and the members of the Working Group for the way in which this Working Group under your guidance has evolved to become one of the central institutions in the human rights efforts of the United Nations and the focal forum in the work for indigenous rights. This has been carried forward in an indispensable and constructive co-operation with indigenous peoples and governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations.

Since this is the first time the Nordic Council of Ministers address the Working Group it would, perhaps, be appropriate briefly to introduce the Nordic co-operation. The basis for the present formal and informal patterns of Nordic co-operation has its basis in informal contacts which grew in the latter part of last century in cultural, academic, professional, and economic fields and between labour unions and political groups. The present formal co-operation, however, did not start until relatively recent with the creation in 1953 of the *Nordic Council*, a joint organ of the Nordic Parliaments and Governments. This institution was supplemented in 1971 by the creation of the *Nordic Council of Ministers* with responsibility for Nordic co-operation at the governmental level. The Council of Ministers is serviced by a Secretariat and by a series of Committees of Senior Officials in various fields of co-operation. Besides these institutions there are a complex set of Nordic institutions and committees addressing both the formal and informal levels of Nordic co-operation.

In the current situation the five Nordic States, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden and the three self-governing territories of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland are represented in the Nordic co-operation.

The Nordic area covers two indigenous peoples, the Sami and Greenlanders and the two have in some fields of Nordic Co-operation been

accorded special interest. It was, therefore, found natural that the Nordic Council of Ministers contributed also to the International Year for Indigenous Peoples. In order to contribute to the overall evaluation of the outcome of the year; my delegation would like to provide some information on Nordic contributions to the year. The basis for this information will be the programme and plan of the Nordic Council of Ministers and therefore incomplete, since other institutions and organs, including the Nordic Cultural Fund, will support activities according to their own criteria.

In preparing Nordic contributions to the year some simple *guidelines* were adopted:

- stressing the importance of indigenous participation in the planning and implementation of the year;
- and using the national committees in the Nordic Countries as important contacts;
- placing priority on new initiatives and projects, which can have a lasting effect on the realisation of the theme of the year;
- and that projects should have a Nordic character and involve at least two Nordic countries.

As special contributions to the year the Nordic Council of Ministers has decided:

1. To provide major support for a joint meeting between the Sami Parliaments in Norway, Sweden and Finland.

This proposal originated from the Sami Parliament in Finland which will turn 20 this year. The proposal further considers the fact that with the newly established Sami Parliament in Sweden, Sami in all three countries now have elected representative bodies and a joint meeting will allow for a discussion of the future forms of Sami co-operation, and the relationship of the Sami Parliaments to other institutions and organisations.

2. To provide major support for the second Arctic Leaders Summit, which is a joint leadership meeting between the Sami Council, Inuit Circumpolar Conference and The Association of the Small Peoples of the Russian North.

The Arctic Leaders Summit II will be co-ordinated by the Sami Council and is planned to take place in Kiruna, Northern Sweden, November 1993.

It is expected that there will be a co-ordination between these two projects and an international conference on International Indigenous Politics and Self-Government, scheduled to take place at the University of Tromsø in Northern Norway, also in November.

3. Supplementary support has been reserved for a seminar organised by the Danish Secretariat for the International Year. The Seminar will address self-determination and self-government by indigenous peoples, based on the Greenland Home Rule system and examine the relevance of this system in other indigenous situations, primarily with a view to Sami and indigenous peoples in Siberia.

4. Substantial support has been granted to an indigenous cultural festival, *Davvi Suvva*, which was organised by two Sami Associations in Sweden and Finland, and which took place around Midsummer. The festival included traditional and modern music, theater, dance, films, arts and handicraft, seminars, informational activities and exhibitions as well as children's activities.

Supplementary support for this festival was granted by the Nordic Cultural Fund.

5. Education and research are one of the central and regular fields of Nordic co-operation. With specific reference to the Indigenous Year, *The Nordic Youth Co-operation Committee* has supported a seminar organised by the Association of Sami Students at the University of Tromsø on indigenous recruitment to higher education, while the Council of Ministers has encouraged the Nordic Academy for Advanced Study to examine possibilities to increase Greenlandic and Sami co-operation in research. In the cultural field, exhibitions of Sami and Greenlandic art has been supported in Europe as well as other exhibitions within Nordic countries and indigenous questions will be included in the Nordic Book Fair in Göteborg, particularly in a section organised by the *Nordic Institute in Greenland*.

With a view to the lasting effects of the year two further activities should be mentioned:

1. In the changing international situation co-operation with other regions close to the North has taken on an increasing importance in Nordic Co-operation.

A conference on Arctic co-operation has therefore been organised by the *Nordic Council* to take place in Iceland this coming August.

The situation of indigenous peoples in the Arctic and their place in the emerging Arctic co-operation will be one of four major themes of the conference.

2. One of the purposes of the international year as well as the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples is to increase the participation of indigenous peoples at all levels in decisions and developments concerning themselves. We should therefore all look to ourselves. In the Nordic context we have therefore started a process to reconsider the position of the Sami in the Nordic co-operative organs. This initiative has been kept separate from the programme activities for the indigenous year, since it involves constitutional questions of the organisation and as such is more complicated. A substantial report on the issue has been drawn up and a discussion phase has started.

The initiative for this step has come from several sides. Let me conclude by quoting the words of the First Minister of Greenland, Mr. *Las EMI Johansen*, during the last Session of the Nordic Council: "1993 could be the year...when the Sami gained direct representation among us...Such renewal would be in direct agreement with the slogan of the UN-year: "A New Partnership".