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NORDIC SAAMI COUNCIL

Review of developments: Finland,
Norway and Sweden 1987-1988:

Presentation to the United Nations
Working Group on Indigenous
Populations

Geneva

1 august 1988

Madame Chairmen

On behalf on the Nordic Saami Council I want to make a brief presentation regarding developments which have take place in Finland, Norway and Sweden over the past year.

First of all I would like to stress that this is a very crucial stage in developments of Standards pertaining to The rights of indigenous peoples.

The ILO is currently engaged in The revision of Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, No 107.

The final report by the World Commission on Environmental and Development, also called the "Brundtland Report" clearly underlines the very central importance of the relationship between land and survival for the indigenous peoples of the world.

Based on the draft universal declaration on indigenous rights prepared by You Madame Chairmen we are now entering into an essential discussion concerning the evolution of standards.

Madame Chairmen

I am pleased to report that there seems, I emphasise seems to be a growing acceptance and concern within the Nordic countries for special recognition and protection of the rights of the saami people.

We also appreciate the concern and initiatives presented by the Nordic governments within the United Nations concerning indigenous rights. Some of the Nordic governments have also given contributions to the the voluntary fund.

Madame Chairmen

In april 1988 the Norwegian Parliament adopted a new amendment to The Norwegian constitution recognizing the Saami people i Norway as indigenous people with certain rights. The Saami Rights commission is now attempting to resolve some issues relating to terretorial rights.

At the present time the government of Finland is considering the important question of Saami language rights based on a proposal made by the Saami Parliament. This proposal however don't take in account the Saami claim that the Saami language shall have the same legal status as the Finnish and Swedish language in the Finnish constitution. The Saami Parliament and The government of Finland have not yet resolved the fundamental issue of land rights within the framework of the proposed Reindeer Management Act.

In Sweden the Saami Rights commission will hopefully, at last, present at the end of this year its final report on Saami Rights. Unfortunately the basic issues relating to territorial rights in Finland, Norway and Sweden remains unresolved.

Madame Chairmen

Hereby I wish to highlight the recent speech of Mr Gorbachev, the general secretary of the Communist Party in USSR on october 1987 in the City of Murmansk (in the Saami region of North Russia). This is viewed by our people as an important contribution to the promotion of environmental consciousness, peace and stability in the Saami region of the North.

The recognition of the special obligations of the Nordic Countries together with USSR in relation to their indigenous peoples was particularly significant.

As a result of this initiative We are currently engaged in discussions with representatives of the government of the Soviet Union toward the future development of scientific and cultural exchanges.

Madame Chairmen

As indigenous peoples situated in Europe we feel a particular obligation to stress the necessity for special activities and programmes which will focus world attention on the year 1992 which marks the 500 th anniversary of the invasion of the indigenous territories of the Americas.

Thank you.