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United Nations Working Group
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Item 5

Review of developments

Statement by
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The Observer Delegation of Sweden

GENEVA, 27 July 1993

950171

Madame Chairman,

The new Sami legislation also strengthens the legal position of reindeer-herding. The most important alterations and clarifications are the following. It is made clear that the right of reindeer-herding is based on immemorial usage and is thus not a right conferred upon the Sami by the State. This right is of a collective nature. The right to engage in reindeer-herding is, however, held only by members of a Sami village. The reason for this limitation is that the reindeer-breeding areas can support only a limited number of reindeer and a limited number of people who depend on this use of the land. Since ancient times the Sami engaged in reindeer-herding have been organized in Sami villages with far-reaching autonomy of decision-making in matters concerning the Sami villages and their reindeer-herding activities. The Government has found it inappropriate to interfere with this ancient tradition.

Reindeer pasturage rights may give rise to conflicts between the Sami and the owners and users of grazing land. The law therefore makes it clear that interference with year-round pasturage by using the land for other purposes is prohibited, if such interference involves considerable inconvenience for reindeer-herding.

Thank you, Madame Chairman.

Madame Chairman,

Under this agenda item I would like to give some information on the new Sami Parliament in Sweden.

In December last year the Swedish Parliament passed a law to set up a governmental authority with the primary task of nurturing a living Sami culture in Sweden. The governing body of this authority is an assembly, the Sameting, with 31 members, all elected every fourth year from among the Sami population. The first elections took place on 16 May this year. On proposal of the Sameting the Government appoints the chairman of the assembly. Day-to-day administration is carried out by a board set up by the assembly, which may also set up other bodies to carry out its duties.

In addition to its main task of fostering Sami culture, the Sameting has been assigned other specific functions, inter alia, to decide on the distribution of funds allocated by the Government to promote Sami culture and to support Sami organizations. The Sameting will also allocate other funds placed at the disposal of the Sami community for joint utilization and will appoint the board of the Sami school. The Sameting will also direct efforts to promote the Sami language and will participate in public planning to ensure that Sami needs are taken into consideration in the utilization of land and water resources, for reindeer-breeding for example. The Sameting will also be responsible for information about Sami affairs.