

Statement by Denmark to EMRIP-II (Geneva 10-14. August, 2009) agenda item 4b:

(Ms. Marianne Lykke Thomsen)

Madam Chairperson,

Distinguished Members of the Expert Mechanism.

The Premier of Greenland already addressed issues concerning the ongoing implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in his presentation Tuesday (August 11), both with regards to the joint efforts by Denmark and Greenland, and issues concerning the internal obligations of the Government of Greenland.

This statement will limit itself to inform the Expert Mechanism of a good practice regarding repatriation, which has been practiced by Greenland and Denmark for some years.

The programme is called 'Utimut – Return,' referring to what it does. Utimut in Greenlandic means return and the programme is about returning cultural objects in the form of archeological artifacts, exhibitions and human remains- where such exists.

Greenland and Denmark has engaged in this – according to the Greenland National Museum and Archives – very constructive partnership for more than 20 years, resulting in the return of more than 35,000 items of cultural heritage.

It is, among others, guided and inspired by UNESCO's actions in the field of restitution of cultural property. But is also very much in compliance with the provisions of the Declaration – notably articles 11 and 12. Article 12, section 2 for example states that: "States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned.

In Greenland, there has been a growing interest in having cultural heritage returned to Greenland. The main argument being, that Greenlanders have the right and ability of immediate access to the physical remains of their past. Repatriation is an important means of restoring cultural pride and identity in Greenland.

In 1981, almost immediately after Greenland obtained Home Rule in 1979, negotiations between the Greenland National Museum and Archives and the National Museum of Denmark were initiated and today about of one third of the collections have been returned. The return is based upon mutually agreed principles laid out by a committee of equal membership from Denmark and Greenland and is decided on a case to case basis. The idea being to establish representative collections in both countries, instead of returning all cultural objects only to be stored.

Human remains have all been repatriated.

It is the view of the museum authorities in Greenland that the primary goal of repatriation should never be the transfer itself but rather the establishment of working relationships beneficial to all parties in terms of knowledge sharing in future research, exhibitions etc.

To celebrate the successful cooperation between Greenland and Denmark in this area and to share the experience of a good practice, the Greenland National Museum and Archives hosted an international conference on repatriation of cultural heritage in Nuuk, Greenland in 2007. The aim of the conference was to facilitate an international and a cross-disciplinary dialogue to promote understanding and mutual respect between parties involved in repatriation in order to work out perspectives for future collaboration.

The Utimut-Return programme has been described and analyzed in two publications: 'Utimut-Return' published jointly by the Greenland and Danish national museums and UNESCO in 2004 and in 'Utimut – Past heritage – Future Partnerships. Discussions on repatriation in the 21st Century published as conference proceedings in 2008 by IWGIA in cooperation with the Greenland National Museum and Archive.

I thank you Madam Chairperson.