

## **Arctic Indigenous Peoples' Dialogue**

Brussels Monday October 13, 2014

Opening Statement by Saami Council President Ms Áile Javo

Thank you for inviting the Saami Council to the Arctic Indigenous Peoples' Dialogue here in Brussels. We appreciate this opportunity to discuss common concerns, challenges, achievements and goals for our homelands of the Arctic and Sub-Arctic regions. Saami Council also appreciates that the program for today's dialogue both gives us the opportunity address our concerns as indigenous peoples and hear presentations about the work EU already is supporting through its existing programs.

Regarding the global processes on indigenous peoples, the Saami Council looks forward to the European Union and the Commissions follow up of the Outcome document of the high level plenary meeting of the General Assembly known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples adopted by the General Assembly in New York only three weeks ago. The Outcome document is action oriented and Saami Council holds great expectations to the European Community to share the work with the actors in the United Nations family and others in promoting the implementation of the Outcome Document, as many of the European Union policies might already be coherent with the standard and can be employed with the UN actions.

In light of this, the Saami Council welcomes the European Union's current review of its policies on indigenous peoples so that they are coherent with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As the only Indigenous Peoples in the European Union today, we have expectations to that the European Union will consult the Saami people in these process, and we can ensure that we stand ready to participate and contribute to this kind of work.

This would be in line with the good experience from the last months of preparations of the Outcome document in New York, where EU were among those that expressed gratitude to the value added by indigenous representatives active participation. Any meaningful participation for the Saami as indigenous people in the European family would imply a stronger presence in the European Capital.

Mr Chair, the beginning of European Union's policies on Indigenous Peoples is said to be inspired by Agenda 21 and United Nations Conference on Environment and Development that took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. EUs policies on many fields concerning the environment point to the importance of safeguarding the reproductive capacity of the natural resource base and how important land and resources are for the survival and well-being of indigenous peoples. This goes equally for the South American Indian in the Rainforest, the Islander in a Small Island State in the Pacific as well as for the Saami people on the tundra or on the fjord.

The foundation for Saami peoples and our cultures survival are healthy, productive and intact terrestrial and marine ecosystems as source for food, clothes and for languages. Climate and environmental changes as well as pollution constitute serious possible pressures on the Saami livelihoods and Saami food security.

The Saami Council appreciates the EUs interest in engaging in the Arctic, as it has pointed out itself in the Arctic Footprint report from 2010, that the people living in the Arctic and the ecosystems that sustain them are enduring the initial brunt of the environmental impacts, while the region itself contributes little to the causes of climate change and production of pollutants. The main source for these environmental impacts are, as we know, to be found outside the Arctic, many of them in Europe. While European Union and the Commission also is the heart for policy development it would be important for the Saami people to have stronger ties to the European capital as one of the veins supporting the heart.

The Saami Council is one of the Permanent Participants to the Arctic Council and we have welcomed new observers to the Arctic Council, also the European Union. We believe the Arctic Council is the primary body to discuss issues on Arctic environment and sustainable development in the North. Therefore bodies that show interest in joining forces to promote and work towards the mandate of the Arctic Council should be welcomed in the room, rather than be let alone outside to develop their own ideas, in foras to which the indigenous peoples have no access. Stronger EU position in the Arctic Council means a need to further develop the cooperation with the Arctic Indigenous peoples as well, which could be facilitated through closer relations here in Brussels.

Finally, the European system runs huge research programs that support science and research projects. Through the management of these programs, the European Union contributes to build the European society or other societies through its priorities. For us, the Saami people, our traditional knowledge has built our societies through millenniums. We are, however, faced

with challenges in climate and environmental changes not seen before, and we need science as well to be able to adapt to ongoing and expected changes. We therefore urge the EU to think carefully through their research priorities and support to research projects, we think Arctic research projects also should contribute to build our societies and that research partnerships need to build on trust and respect with the Arctic indigenous peoples.

We notice that the EU summarizes the way forward on its Arctic Policies with three words: knowledge, responsibility and engagement. Concerning the Knowledge basis, it is important for the Saami Council to emphasize the need to recognize that the Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge can contribute to better understanding of the environment, the changes we see and how to cope with it. The traditional knowledge should be equally valued with other science, as the baseline for decisions making and management of natural resources.

Thank you.