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President of the Sámi Parliament in Finland

Speech of the President of the Sámi Parliament in Finland in Rovaniemi Arctic Spirit 2021

Distinguished Minister for Foreign Affairs,

Distinguished Representatives of States, regional authorities and Indigenous Peoples, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to bring the greetings of the Sámi Parliament in Finland to the Rovaniemi Arctic Spirit Conference today. For the beginning, I want to thank for the invitation to give a speech in this conference, which provides a venue for different actors to come together and strengthen cooperation and dialogue on issues concerning the Arctic region.

This year's conference focuses on Euro-Arctic cooperation, with the Barents region at the forefront. I see it of particular importance, that the Indigenous Peoples living in the region has a voice and position in this cooperation. Within the framework of this cooperation, it is also important to remember, that Indigenous Peoples have the right to self-determination and right to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development, as stated in the article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In addition, where the United Nations Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples reaffirms the right to self-determination, it builds even more precise picture on the commitments that the states have. For example, under the article 32 of the Declaration, Indigenous Peoples should have "right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources".

I want to emphasize Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination and to free, prior and informed consent. These specific rights need to be taken into account at different levels of decision making when developing, planning and implementing new actions and policies in the region. We have still a lot to work upon accepting and understanding that not only the major societies can decide the core

lines of development in specific areas. Especially during the time of climate crisis, it is essential to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and to build together societies resilient to the changes that we are already currently experiencing.

One good example of the fruitful dialogue and cooperation between the state's and Sámi people's representatives is the drafting process of the Finnish Barents Euro-Arctic Council presidency program, that Minister Haavisto presented us earlier. I want to thank Finland for our cooperation during this process. I consider it highly valuable and hope that it will continue also during the Finnish presidency. Another good example is the development of the Finland's new strategy for Arctic policy, which will be discussed more thoroughly tomorrow.

The themes of the program of the Finnish presidency are important also for the Sámi people. Sustainability is naturally the core value and basis for our existence as Indigenous People in the region. Our traditional livelihoods and way of being are strongly based on sustainable use of our traditional lands and natural resources. The cornerstone of Indigenous Peoples' success story is our self-sufficiency, for example, when it comes to food security. Now all this is under a threat, because of climate change in the Arctic.

Changing climate and extreme weather conditions are already posing threats and challenges for Sámi people's possibilities to conduct our traditional livelihoods such as fishing and reindeer herding. An increase in water body temperatures impact fish stocks and species in Sámi homeland areas.

Sámi reindeer herding has been an example of Sámi people's capability to adapt to the changing societal structures and environment. We have managed to maintain our traditional way of reindeer herding and at the same time developed it as economically sustainable livelihood. Today however, changing climate is having both direct and indirect impacts on our possibilities to conduct reindeer herding as a main source of income. This affects our culture and languages in negative ways as our traditional livelihoods are the backbone of our people for our survival.

Frozen and moulting grazing lands are concrete challenges for the reindeer herders already today. Also winters with extreme snow conditions have severe consequences both for reindeer and reindeer herders. Winter 2019-2020 was a catastrophic example of this. Thousands of reindeer died due to hard winter. Most of the reindeer herders had to start to drive supplementary nutrition for reindeer to their winter grazing lands. This increased expenses radically. Unfortunately, I am afraid, that we will have another year of crisis in head of us because of the coming winter. I hope that states are ready to support indigenous Sámi reindeer herding to survive in these changing conditions.

It is obvious, that the Sámi people are at the frontline facing the challenges of the climate change and trying to find even more sustainable ways to conduct our traditional livelihoods. However, at the same time we use snowmobiles and ATV's almost in a daily basis in our work. We work in a rather challenging environments and often harsh weather conditions, and it is a matter of security, sometimes even life or death, that we can trust on tools that we are using. Currently our vehicles still use fossil fuels, because that is only feasible option available. The prices of fossil fuels are getting higher all the time impacting the income from the livelihood negatively.

As the Finnish presidency is focusing on people-to-people actions, I am hopeful that Indigenous Peoples' needs and visions are taken into account in a more sufficient way. It is important to strengthen an understanding of cooperation in order to build more sustainable region, and I hope that Finnish presidency contributes to this in a positive way. I am hopeful that the Indigenous Peoples' summit, which was organized for the first time during the Russian presidency of the Council, can be further developed during the Finnish presidency to be a high-level event discussing important matters relevant to the Indigenous Peoples in the Barents region.

One of the priorities of the Finnish presidency is transport and logistics. I hope that we could find solutions to improve already existing road connections in the Barents region. Currently, I could mention for instance the road connection from Skibotn Norway to Palojoensuu Finland, which is in bad condition and sometimes even unsafe to drive. Thus, before planning any new connections we really need to make sure that current infrastructure is in a good condition.

Although the atmosphere in beginning of the Finnish Presidency of the Barents Regional Council is positive. I want to mention two examples of the situations, in which cooperation with Indigenous Peoples has failed earlier and rights of the Indigenous Peoples were neglected while making decisions concerning land use and resources. In both situations, local Sámi took their cases to the supreme courts and finally won them.

Other one is the case of Girjas Sameby in Sweden, which local Sámi reindeer herders won and got finally back their rights to decide on hunting and fishing in their area. Other case is from Fosen, Norway, where the supreme court ruled that windfarms in the Fosen peninsula harm Sámi reindeer herding and violate the international covenant on civil and political rights.

In both cases long legal proceedings could have been avoided, if the rights of the Sámi as Indigenous Peoples were respected and states' authorities consulted and cooperated in good faith with Sámi

rightsholders from the beginning. I truly hope that we can learn something from these cases and act better in the future.

Finally, I wish all best for the Barents cooperation and believe that the Finnish presidency can be a success.

Thank you!