



STATEMENTS

Indigenous Issues, Climate Change and the Arctic

State Secretary Valle talked about the Norwegian Government's strategy called "New building blocs of the North" at a discussion on the Arctic at Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 21 May. The strategy speaks of increased focus on development of economic opportunities and emphasis on education and environmental protection. The Sámi culture and traditional knowledge play a big part.

22/05/2009 :: Madame Chair,

In 2002, an expert group was appointed by the Ministers of Sami affairs in Finland, Norway and Sweden and the presidents of the Sami Parliaments in these countries. The expert group submitted in 2005 a draft convention on Nordic Sami cooperation. Since then, the draft has been the object of broad hearings and analysis at the national level, also in cooperation with the Sami Parliaments.

The draft convention consists of 51 articles. The overall objective of the draft convention is to affirm and strengthen the rights of the indigenous Sámi people, with particular emphasis on securing and developing the Sámi language, culture, livelihoods and society. The draft convention recognizes the Sámi people as an indigenous people of the three countries, as one people residing across national borders. The draft convention contains a set of minimum standards, based on existing and emerging international human rights standard.

It is my sincere hope that the states of Norway, Finland and Sweden and the three Sámi Parliaments, can reach an agreement this year on how to proceed with negotiations about a Nordic Sami convention.

Madame Chair,

A strategy for the development of the Norwegian High North has been an important issue for my government. This strategy includes increased activity and a stronger strategic focus on efforts to protect the environment and respond to climate change. The focus on the High North will make it easier to see these issues, and how they are interrelated, in the context of our foreign policy vis-à-vis other countries and in international forums.

On March 12th this year my Government presented the latest strategies for further development of the region.

Some of the main focuses of this strategy called "New building blocs of the North" which aims at an increased focus on development of economic opportunities are emphasis on education and environmental protection. One part of this strategy will be to establish programs across national borders in the region, for documentation of traditional knowledge in a Sámi perspective. Another element will be establishment of a program for indigenous industry development based on their traditional culture.

A program for the development of ethical guidelines for industrial development in traditional indigenous areas of the North will also be an important part of this program.

These are examples that will be important regarding capacity building among the Sámi. Such capacity is essential for real participation in decisions affecting them.

Madame Chair,

The Arctic is a region characterized by close cooperation and the absence of conflict, an area of peace and stability. Our primary responsibility is to maintain this favorable situation.

However, profound changes are occurring. Today we know that climate change is taking place most rapidly and most visibly in the Arctic. It is one of the best places in the world to study its causes and dynamics. And it is this knowledge that will determine whether humanity will be able to address the challenges posed by climate change.

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Indigenous Issues, Climate Change an...

No-one feels the effect of this climate change more than the indigenous peoples living in this region. The changes are bringing new challenges to their traditional way of life. It is important that their knowledge and experience are respected and utilized when we all have to adapt to a changing climate.

At the conclusion, I would also like to stress that we share the concerns raised by Canada and Greenland regarding the EU-ban on sale of seal products.

Thank you for your attention.

Valle's statement about implementation of the UN declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, May 20