

Statement made by Lars-Anders Baer, Sámi Parliament in Sweden
1st IPY Workshop on Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks
Stockholm, Sweden 12-14 November 2007

You're Majesty.

IPY Workshop participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great privilege for me to address this first IPY Workshop on Sustaining Arctic Observing Network here in Stockholm on the behalf of the Sámi Parliament in Sweden and Sámi Parliamentary Council.

Allow me first to congratulate the IPY network as a whole for your commitment to involve indigenous peoples and local population in this important work at all levels. This reaffirms the commitments made by the member states in the Arctic Council, stated most recently in *Salekhard Declaration* adopted by Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Salekhard, Russian federation in November 2006.

In this framework I want to take the opportunity to briefly inform the workshop about the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by United Nations General Assembly, September 13th 2007. The question of rights of indigenous peoples has risen from small avant-garde thematic issues among indigenous peoples themselves, dedicated NGOs, legal scholars and a few friendly states at the end of 1970s to a main stream human rights' matter in the 21st century. The adoption of the Declaration constitutes a historical milestone in the struggle for the recognition of indigenous peoples' human rights and fundamental freedoms, ending centuries of marginalisation and discrimination, and confirming that indigenous peoples are peoples, equal in dignity and rights with all other peoples.

The Declaration's explicit acknowledgment of indigenous peoples being entitled to the unqualified right to self-determination, including the right of my people, the Sámi people, to freely determine our own economic, social and cultural development and control and decide over our own natural resources. The Declaration underlines our right to strengthen our distinct political, legal, economical institutions, including our publicly elected Sámi parliaments and the Sámi Parliamentarian Council, but also traditional local economic and cultural structures such as reindeer herding communities (*renbeteslag*, *samebyar* and *siida*) and coastal Sea Sámi communities.

It is also interesting to note the progressive nature of the provisions in the Declaration pertaining to indigenous peoples' right to own, use and control the lands, territories and natural resources. The Declaration consequently proclaims that Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden no longer one-sidedly can regard territories traditionally utilized by the Sámi as the property of the State or third parties. Rather, the Declaration obliges the States to recognize that the Sámi are the owners of their

traditional territories and natural resources. This for instance means that the Sámi territories should not be used for industrial or other activities without the free, prior and informed consent of the Sámi, and without them directly benefiting from such resource utilization. In addition, the Sámi have the right to restitution of or, when this is not possible, to just and fair compensation for lands, territories and natural resources taken without our consent.

The UN Declaration goes much further than the ILO Convention No. 169 and the proposed Nordic Sámi Convention. With the adoption of the UN Declaration, containing international minimum standards for indigenous peoples' rights, Finland, Russia and Sweden have no excuses not to adopt the ILO Convention No. 169 and the Nordic States the proposed Nordic Sámi Convention, without further delay.

However, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is a non-binding agreement that does not oblige the UN member states to follow the provisions in the declaration. When the United Nations General Assembly adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 144 countries voted in favour, nine abstained and four voted against it. Among the states that voted against it are United States and Canada. Another Arctic country, namely Russia, abstained.

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples should however encourage states, international organizations, agencies, northern residents in the framework of these serial workshops to include indigenous peoples in cooperation on equal footing.

This first workshop will discuss if current Arctic observing and data and information management activities are sufficient to meet users' needs? From an indigenous point of view the answer is partly yes and mainly no. The modernisation of indigenous communities, exploration of natural resources and the consequence of climate changes has dramatically changed the need for accessible and readable data and information.

The Arctic Council is a good example how indigenous peoples can be involved in high level segments of political decisions making and also that necessary economic resources are allocation to indigenous people's representatives so they can participate on equal footing in the process. We are therefore grateful for the Danish to the Arctic Indigenous Secretariat in Copenhagen.

In Sweden some just to say that the Sámi Peoples are like the weather – everybody is talking about it - but nobody can deal with it. In the Arctic and circumpolar area we are about 2 million indigenous peoples. The Sámi population is about 60 000 up to 100 000 individuals. The traditional Sámi territory and the Sámi people have due to different circumstances in the past been divided between four national states. The

integration of the Sámi territory to these national states followed most of the benchmark of colonization. The process of colonization has caused challenging problems – a past that we still have to deal with in our daily lives and in our politically reality. This is an experience we more or less share with other indigenous peoples in the Arctic.

We can't avoid mention impacts of the climate driven changes of the ecosystems in the Arctic. Indigenous communities are facing major economic and culture impacts of a warming Arctic. For some indigenous peoples their future is literary melting under their feet's. The consequences are fast becoming more visible and greatly influencing the living conditions of the indigenous peoples in the Arctic. The governments in the Arctic region, European Union, other relevant international bodies must find common strategy to act promptly.

The Arctic environment and the traditional indigenous economy and livelihoods as hunting, fish and reindeer herding facing tremendous challenges not only because of the climate change but also because of the increasing extraction of minerals and oil and gas. As lined out in the UN declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the States must recognize that the indigenous peoples rights their traditional territories and natural resources, have their free, prior and informed consent when resources are exploited also make arrangements so they can benefit from such resource utilization.

Finally I want to emphasise that indigenous peoples in the Arctic don't only wants to be living indicators in measuring and monitoring climate change in the Arctic, but also be equal partners with other peoples, nations and other interests both in the development of the Arctic and in facing the challenges of climate change in the Arctic and elsewhere.

Thank You