**Sustainable Development in the territories of indigenous peoples – Opening introduction**

By political advisor Eirik Larsen, Sámi Parliament of Norway

First of all, on behalf of the Sámi Parliament of Norway, I would like to thank for this opportunity to address the Expert Group meeting on this important issue. I am also asked to send warm greetings from the President of the Sámi Parliament of Norway, Ms. Aili Keskitalo.

Initially, I would like to say a few words about the Sámi people. We are one of many Arctic indigenous peoples. We have our traditional territories within the national borders of Finland, Norway, Sweden and Russia.

Our land is called Sápmi. We are united through common history, culture and languages, and through the use of our traditional land and coastal areas, including the resources found there. The contact between the Sámi across national borders is of crucial importance for the preservation of traditions and for the development of Sámi unity and diversity.

The Sámi Parliament of Norway is representative for the Sámi People living in Norway – democratically elected by and among the Sámi in Norway. The Sámi Parliament shall improve the Sámi's political position and promote Sámi interests. The Parliament deals with any matters considered to involve the Sámi people.

There are also Sámi parliaments in Finland and Sweden, but I will focus on the situation of the Norwegian side of the Sápmi.

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The Sámi Act concerning the Sami parliament and other Sami legal matters has the same purpose as the Norwegian Constitution § 108, which was adopted in 1988.

It states: The authorities of the state shall create conditions enabling the Sámi people to preserve and develop its language, culture and way of life.

The Constitutions sets first, that the state shall create conditions. Secondly, it sets that the Sámi themselves shall be enable to persevere the and develop their culture. This means that the state has a facilitator role, and the Sámi people has an implementation role, in accordance with the Indigenous Peoples´ right to self-determination.

The main objective of the Sámi Parliament of Norway's international efforts is to protect and promote the interests of the Sámi and Indigenous Peoples at the international level, and to exercise our right to self-determination in respect of our own development. This work is based on the rights recognized in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It is crucial for the implementation of Indigenous Peoples right to self-determination that the rights set out in the Declaration are respected, incorporated into national legislation and activated into practical policy.

The Declaration is based on the principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, equality, non-discrimination, good governance and good faith. The Declaration is based on the principle of Indigenous Peoples’ right to self-determination, a right that imply that Indigenous Peoples themselves shall determine their own political position and freely promote their financial, social and cultural development.

The right to self-determination also includes rights related to health, education, teaching in their own languages and rights with respect to culture, media, intellectual and religious traditions, as well as the right to protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions. One basic element of Indigenous Peoples’ self-determination is the right to lands, territories and resources as important material platforms for indigenous cultures.

Since 1989, the Sámi Parliament of Norway has been granted decision-making authority in several areas. These include the compilation of Sámi teaching plans, questions linked to the Sámi language, the administration of cultural artefacts and a number of schemes linked to the funding of Sámi institutions. This also includes management of natural resources.

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The Sámi way of life and our traditional livelihood, especially in relation to reindeer husbandry, fresh and seawater fishing, small scale farming, hunting and gathering is seriously threatened by climate change. Since reindeer husbandry is a cornerstone of Sámi culture, a loss of the industry would have fatal consequences for Sámi languages, culture and community life.

That is also the case for other Indigenous Peoples. We are especially vulnerable because of the close connection between traditional livelihoods and nature. The on-going work on adaptation and resilience shows that the Arctic region is a hot spot in terms of warming, and climate change.

It has been determined that Arctic Indigenous communities are among those most vulnerable to climate change. Climatic change is taking place more than twice as fast in the Arctic as elsewhere in the world. In our area, we are not talking about 1.5 or 2 degrees of warming, but perhaps of 4 to 6 degrees already by 2050. Many aspects of Indigenous Peoples´ cultures in the Arctic are dependent on snow and ice. If they disappear, we will find it extremely difficult to maintain our cultures. Climate change also makes our areas more accessible for extractive industries and more vulnerable for pollution.

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Today, we observe that changes in Arctic biodiversity have a major impact on the livelihood, living conditions, and well-being of communities and indigenous peoples and local people living in the Arctic and elsewhere. We see impact by climate change and impact of new land use.

Maintaining the health of ecosystems is an important way of helping communities and societies adapt to and mitigate climate change, while generating multiple environment and development benefits.

In Sámi resource areas, the diversity of nature, cultural monuments and the land and the coastal areas comprise an important part of the material basis for Sámi culture. The management of areas, nature and cultural heritage is therefore important to ensure the basis for preserving and developing of our Sámi culture.

We seek for the highest standards for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. It is a point that traditional Sámi, and as well Indigenous usage, is maintained and developed in such a way that it preserves the diversity of nature. It benefits our culture and way of live. Adoption of ecosystem based management could achieve this in a better way in our opinion.

The Sámi Parliament places emphasis on traditional knowledge and understanding when deciding on the use and protection of biodiversity. Solutions which pave the way for active local involvement in decision-making processes should therefore become more common. Policymaking needs to be driven both by scientific findings, and also by accumulated traditional knowledge and wisdom. It is an on-going challenge to achieve inclusion of contrasting knowledge visions in the field of biodiversity and ecosystem services and to ensure participation of Indigenous Peoples´ traditional knowledge holders in both national and international processes.

We must prepare for the effects of climate change, thereby reducing the vulnerability of communities and ecosystems. Communities, enterprises and institutions must build up their climate change resilience. Maintaining the health of ecosystems is an important way of helping communities and societies adapt to and mitigate climate change, while generating multiple environment and development benefits.

I believe, it’s necessary, to further strengthen the capacity and involvement of indigenous peoples in this kind of processes. This is the time in history when we have no other prudent alternative but to continue to work together: States, Indigenous Peoples, NGOs and other sectors of civil society. Indigenous Peoples are not the reason for the climate change, but Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous way of life could be part of a solution.

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I will now focus on the self-determination, and local management of land and natural resources, with examples from my area and the recent development, or trend.

In Norway, and in Sweden and Finland, we obviously have the Sámi Parliaments, and they receive finances from the states and. The next question is how the Sámi Parliament is part of the management of our natural rescores.

In 2005 a new Act, the Finnmark Act, was adopted by the Parliament of Norway, after a consent from the Sámi Parliament was achieved. 45´000 square km of the Sámi area was transferred from the national government to regional ownership, to the Finnmark Property. The intent of the Act was to create the conditions for the land and resources to be managed in a balanced and ecologically sustainable manner – and in particular to contribute to a stronger foundation for Sámi culture.

The Finnmark Property has 6 board members, where 3 of them is appointed of the Sámi Parliament. However, we experience that Sámi local communities not always are satisfied with the management. Ongoing now, is a Supreme Court Case where a local village claim their right to manage their resources. Outside of Finnmark county, there is already an example where a local community has achieved legal recognition for local management of natural resources. And in Sweden, a similar case is ongoing, and the verdict came a few minutes ago, and as I have understood, the Sámi community won, which mean that the court recognized the local Samis right to managing their own resources. We will see if the Swedish Government will make an appeal to Supreme Court of Sweden.

In the Deatnu river, one of the main rivers in Sápmi, the local fishing is reduced for the benefit of tourists. The reduction was set due to a new agreement between Norway and Finland, without a consent from the Sámi Parliaments of Norway and Finland and the local Sámi community.

I support and believe in local management. Not only is it a right according to the Declaration and the ILO Convention nr. 169 – but we also strongly believe that the people living closest to the resources are the best to manage the resources. The locals´ way of lives and culture depends on them, and they have the best knowledge and interest to achieve a sustainable management in an eternal perspective.