

PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Opening Ceremony 19th April 2021

Statement by Mr. Pekka Haavisto, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Madam Chair, Members of the Permanent Forum,

Chief of the Onondaga Nation,

Assistant Secretary General,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address the Twentieth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I have good memories about meeting the members of the Permanent Forum in Inari, the Sami Homeland, just over a year ago.

The topic of the Permanent Forum “Peace, justice and strong institutions: the role of Indigenous Peoples in implementing SDG 16” is most appropriate at the times of global uncertainty, COVID-19 pandemic and accelerating climate change.

The 2030 Agenda is a remarkable achievement and must guide our policies together with the Paris Climate Agreement as regards the planet, people and prosperity.

We, the Member States, have pledged that no one will be left behind. We are committed to enhance welfare and the rights of indigenous peoples according to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

Global warming and large-scale shifts in weather patterns have had adverse effects on Indigenous Peoples. The degradation of land and loss of biodiversity are threatening indigenous cultures – just to mention reindeer herding in the Arctic, or finding the ingredients for traditional medicine in the rainforest.

There is a risk that the current pandemic, which also has had many detrimental effects on indigenous peoples, can make indigenous peoples even more vulnerable. I wish to echo the words of the Chair of the Permanent Forum, Anne Nuorgam, who has urged Member States and the international community to include the specific needs and priorities of the Indigenous Peoples in addressing the global outbreak of COVID-19.

Several articles in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are central to reaching Goal 16, namely, addressing issues of self-determination and self-governance, participation in decision-making and access to justice. The Goal 16 also captures an important idea of inclusion and sustainability. When people can influence the decisions that affect their lives, they will flourish. Therefore, inclusion of Indigenous Peoples on issues affecting them is a long-standing priority for Finland.

However, due to historical injustices Indigenous Peoples are marginalized in many places in the world. Redress and reconciliation have been overlooked. Luckily, we have seen truth and reconciliation commissions put in place to investigate collective injustices in history. The purpose of uncovering what has really happened is to prevent such injustices from occurring again.

In Finland, the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is about to begin. It is important to share best practices and we are looking forward to learning from others, too.

Finally, I want to applaud the work of indigenous human rights defenders who risk their lives in order to advance their rights. I am deeply concerned about the increase in reprisals against them.

In today's world peaceful resolution of conflicts and access to justice and rule of law are more important than ever, and new ways to mediate and reconcile must be explored worldwide.

Understanding each other is a prerequisite for sustainability and inclusion. The Permanent Forum is the perfect arena for us all to meet and to take forward the goals of Agenda 2030 and UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I wish everyone an excellent meeting.

Thank you.