

**Statement by Mattias Åhrén, President of the Sámi Council,
on the occasion of the 6th Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council in
Tromsø 29. April 2009**

Mr Chair, distinguished Ministers, Indigenous leaders, brothers and sisters of the Arctic.

First the Saami Council would like to congratulate the Norwegian Chairmanship for its able leadership of the Arctic Council. We welcome the new data and reports on observed and projected climate change in the Arctic and the project reports looking into the responses to the climate change.

We face many challenges related to the climate change. First, increased access to non-renewable resources in our homelands has created a “race to the Arctic” and a change in land-use. We humbly ask the states that participate in the race to the Arctic to be mindful of that you all base your claims to the resources in the high north on claims to rights to indigenous territories. If such claims cannot be settled in a mutually agreeable manner with the indigenous people in question, you might simultaneously loose your claim to the resources in the Arctic. Second, we see that efforts to mitigate climate change by increased use of renewable resources such as wind-mills and hydro-electric dams intensify pressure on our lands never seen before.

In a formal response to the government, the Northernmost Swedish County Administrative Board on 3 March 2009 stated that should a proposed construction of a wind-mill park within the reindeer grazing lands of Östra Kikkejaure Saami community result in the community no longer being able to pursue reindeer husbandry,

the national interest to combat climate change still takes precedent. This would imply that the cultural roots of the Östra Kikkejaure reindeer herders are pulled up. They will be thrown out of the lands their forefathers have used since time immemorial, and that they are currently trying to pass on to their children. The Saami Council submits that it is not fair of the majority society, being the main contributors to the global warming, demanding such a sacrifice by its indigenous population.

Mr. Chair,

We believe that the Saami people can adapt to climate change. But there is nothing we can do if you take our land from us.

Mr Chair,

The Saami often refer to that our elders held unique and important knowledge. Also you have seniors in your system, and we take this opportunity to advice you to pay attention to one in particular. The President of the 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly H.E. Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann addressed the Indigenous Peoples Global Summit on Climate Change in Anchorage last week and he appealed:

”(to) the parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to ensure that the rights of indigenous peoples, as contained in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, be respected and implemented. This includes respecting the right of indigenous peoples to have their free, prior and informed consent obtained before any climate-change-related project is brought into their communities.”

We would encourage you to apply this also for the new opportunities for resource development in the Arctic. We strongly urge you to also to take this opportunity to do it right, by involving all rightholders in the processes.

Mr Chair,

Having extended our gratitude to Norway for its leadership over the past two and a half years, the Saami Council looks forward to the Danish chairmanship and holds great expectations for its program.

Thank you for your attention.