

## **AC Ministerial meeting in Kiruna May 15, 2013**

### **Statement by Egil Olli, President of the Sámi Parliament in Norway**

Honourable ministers, Indigenous leaders, representatives, brothers and sisters of the Arctic

The Sámi Parliament in Norway cooperates well with the Norwegian minister of foreign affairs on Arctic issues, and finds that the Indigenous dimension occupies a significant position in Norway's policy for the North. This is in tune with the place Indigenous questions occupy in the Arctic cooperation. We are greatly looking forward to the continuation and further development of this dimension in the Arctic Council under the leadership of Canada and Minister Leona Aglukkaq. We would like to thank Minister Aglukkaq for the interest she has taken in communicating with the Sámi during her visit to Scandinavia and we look forward seeing the Minister giving indigenous issues high priority also in her future effort.

The situation currently facing Arctic areas, with growing internationalisation and interest for the exploitation of natural resources, can open new opportunities. At the same time, growing pressures are being exerted on Indigenous cultures and livelihoods. Climate change can give easier access and increased economic activities, but also poses new challenges in relation to indigenous people's traditional industries on land and at sea. In Sámi areas, reindeer husbandry and traditional fishing are clearly being impacted by these development trends.

It is of crucial importance that new development in the Arctic be experienced as favourable by the Indigenous peoples affected. For that to happen, there are some matters that must be taken into consideration.

First, Indigenous people's rights must be respected and complied with, thereby securing their opportunity to participate in decisions affecting their future in accordance. Further, the management of resources must include protection of the basis for Indigenous industries, culture and language. In that connection, there may be grounds for the Arctic Council to consider devoting more attention to the Indigenous peoples' cultural heritage, sacred sites and cultural landscapes.

The Indigenous peoples of the Arctic possess valuable knowledge about nature, the environment and traditions of their territories, and about adaptive strategies and living under marginal circumstances. It is important that this knowledge be granted status and relevance, so it can help build a good platform for decision makers and those who live in the Arctic.

If we are to meet the common challenges currently facing us, and to take advantage of the opportunities they entail, the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic must be empowered, and they must have the requisite capacity and expertise to contribute to progress and to further develop their own societies. Our homelands are in the north, and our futures are inextricably bound to the future of the North.

Thank you for your attention.