

Intervention by Anne Nuorgam, president of the Saami Council – AC ministerial meeting 9th October 2002 Suoločielgi, Inari

Ministers, brothers and sisters

The indigenous peoples of the arctic play a central role in the Arctic Council. This model of cooperation was launched in Johannesburg by member states and deserves credit for its transparent involvement of indigenous peoples as Sergei already pointed out.

The Arctic is maybe the most important indicator of the global environmental status. The developments we observe here are in fact signals of what to expect globally in a couple of decades. One can ask if it this time is any point in being first?

Saami Council welcome that the results from phase I of AMAP been actively used during international negotiations on reducing pollution, among others the POP-negotiations. Also the recent phase II studies point out areas with potentially immense impact on our lives as peoples of the Arctic. One area with special concern is radioactivity. We strongly support all efforts to reduce the risk of new accidents in countries utilizing this technology. Chernobyl was a huge disaster also affecting the Saami people. Now 16 years later we are still trying to reduce the levels of radioactivity in reindeer meat in many areas. Fortunately we are told that our diet contains good amount of traditional food with positive effects higher than the negative effects of the radioactivity.

The Saami people as well as indigenous peoples all over the world, are more or less deprived the possibilities of taking our fair share of responsibility. Responsibility follows rights and, the tools to act responsible are so far not in our hands. The Arctic Council studies are extremely important for us and for our future, in that respect we wish to extend our gratitude to all of the working-groups. Still it is hard to get away from the fact that we as indigenous peoples sometimes feel that we are studied with our hands tied.

We see our role as caretakers of our local societies and areas, as well as partners in the global society. We don't want a continuous situation of being told that we have to change our diet without decisive influence on what is happening in our areas.

The indigenous peoples of the Arctic have managed and been an integral part of these areas for thousands of years and we have ambitions of continuing being that.

Thank you!