

Statement by Ms. Åsa Larsson Blind, President of the Saami Council,

Eleventh Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council

Roavvenjárga,

May 7, 2019

Mr. Chair, Ministers, Indigenous leaders, Observers, friends of the Arctic.

The Saami Council would, first of all like to congratulate Finland on its very able leadership of the Arctic Council. Mr. Chair, thank you for your warm recognition of Saami Council in your opening remark. It has been a pleasure for us too, to work with your chairmanship team. I also want to mention how proud I am of our Saami Council delegation here today, including both elders and youth.

During this term the Arctic Council has actually received two global awards for its work: firstly the Gourmand Cookbook Award for the Best Cookbook of the World in 2018 for the EALLU - Indigenous Youth, Food Knowledge & Arctic Change project and just last week for the Arctic Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) report that received the 2019 global award of the International Association on Impact Assessment (IAIA).

Mr. Chair, dear friends, let us take a moment to also reflect upon that during Finland's chairmanship the Arctic Council was nominated to the Nobel Peace Prize.

While we were getting here yesterday, the IPBES released its global assessment with a clear message of an alarming rate of species extinction, and Nature's Dangerous Decline. The findings are horrific, it states that:

“Three-quarters of the land-based environment and about 66% of the marine environment have been significantly altered by human actions and on average these trends have been less severe or avoided in areas held or managed by Indigenous Peoples.”

This tells a story of a best practice for success that we could learn from in the Arctic.

Cooperation and co-management between Indigenous peoples and states as equal partners is indeed the best chance we have for an Arctic with high bio -and cultural diversity, a prosperous Arctic for all.

Adding to that, one of the findings presented in the WWF score card on Sunday points to that Arctic states continue to show an unwillingness to recognize indigenous peoples as equal partners in the management of the Arctic region. This shows there are challenges with implementation at national level, but unlike other regions in the world, we have the Arctic Council as a forum for cooperation.

2019, by the UN declared as the International year of Indigenous languages. Which recently, by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples, has been expanded to a decade of Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous Languages. This provides a unique opportunity for the Arctic Council to prioritize the indigenous languages. Our indigenous knowledge and languages are inextricably linked, both holding valuable knowledge, lessons learnt, and know-hows related to biodiversity, climate change adaptation and resilience. The environment to which the indigenous languages apply are changing dramatically. We know that the Arctic indigenous knowledge and the inherent indigenous languages holds insights to address these changes, to adapt and to identify potential solutions that could benefit us all. The Saami Council will take an initiative on languages and will look for broad support for that within the Arctic Council.

Finally, Mr. Chair, In the popular youth book series about Harry Potter, there is a Wizard, Lord Voldemort, also referred to as “The-one-who-should-not-be-named”. If he is named, he might appear. By naming the enemy the wizards will put their lives at risk. We would like to underscore that Climate Change and its impacts are nothing like Lord Voldemort that appears only if mentioned. For us living in the Arctic, we can tell you it already takes place, and have great impacts on our lives. By mentioning it by its real name – we can fight it, reduce its impacts, - we do not even need magic – this room has the power and potential to agree on ambitious levels of reduction of emissions and set a standard for the rest of the world.

And today, we need to express our deepest concern about the development of the commitment for this ministerial. In a time of great urgency, we, the Arctic states and Arctic Indigenous Peoples gathered around this table, are in the best position to make commitments to act in the best for the environment and the global humanity.

We look forward to the Icelandic Chairmanship and to a close cooperation with Iceland on their program. The Saami Council stands ready to contribute to continue to hold high standards of the Arctic Council work.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.