

**Arctic Council Meeting of Deputy Ministers
Copenhagen 27. May 2010**

**Responding to Emerging Challenges in the Arctic
by Niko Valkeapää, member of Saami Council**

Thank you Mr Chair,

Distinguished Deputy Ministers, Indigenous peoples' leaders, ladies and gentlemen,

First the Saami Council would like to congratulate the Danish Chairmanship for its able chairmanship that is now half way through.

The Saami Council's vision for tomorrow's Arctic is an Arctic with healthy environment and productive ecosystems that continues to provide services for the livelihoods subsiding on these ecosystems. The Saami culture depends on the living resources such as reindeer herding, coastal and inland fisheries, hunting and gathering. Without access to these resources and without having confidence in that the nature provides us with healthy food, the development of our culture will be threatened. Healthy Arctic ecosystems are vital to our economies and the material production of our cultural also tomorrow.

The Saami Council is confident that the Arctic Council is the body that, due to its nature as a tri-party partnership between member states, indigenous peoples and researchers, is able to shape decisions that are based on the best available knowledge, both traditional knowledge and science, and thus being able to give wise guidance to the decision makers both at international and national level.

The Saami Council believes that the value of the ecosystem-based livelihoods or subsistence livelihoods needs to be recognised in the race for short-lived fortunes in the Arctic.

Mr Chair,

Would any of the arctic states be able to confirm that there is emergency preparedness in place when an accident happens with a tanker carrying crude oil, during transshipment, or if a cruise ship goes down with a couple of thousand tourists onboard? Are we prepared for such accidents in the Arctic today? Is the best available equipment in the world good enough in the Arctic? Or would it be wise to wait with the exploration activities, if we are not sure.

From some perspective, the future might be under water, the Saami Council is still certain that the long term future, beyond the resource exploitation in the north, certainly will still be at the coast and on the tundra.

Good governance need to be in ensured in order to face the evolving challenges in the Arctic. Good governance for us embraces the Saami peoples' right to self-determination, including the right to determine our economical and social development, through which our culture continues to be vital and constantly enriched.

- Thank you. Mr Chair