

**Ministers, deputy Ministers, distinguished colleagues,**

On behalf of the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples in the Barents Euro-Arctic region, I would like to express my gratitude for the invitation.

I would like to congratulate the Russian Chair on the implementation of an eventful and diverse program. It seems not one corner of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region remains untouched by the BEAC Chairmanship of these two years.

I want to express gratitude for the good cooperation in planning and implementing the first Barents Indigenous Peoples Summit, held in Moscow last April. The first of its kind, an event aiming at bringing indigenous peoples and high levels officials to the same table, to engage in a dialogue on our common future. I believe we have agreed that it was a success. It was a success that deserves to be repeated, and the shape of the event might be what we need to make sure that the views of the indigenous peoples are included in the plans for the development of this region.

Also, it is of high value for the indigenous peoples, to be able to discuss common challenges and opportunities with officials representing all decision-making levels. It may not come as any surprise that the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples encourage the incoming chair, and the future BEAC chairs, to take this initiative further. I would be so bold as to say that every chairmanship ought to join forces with indigenous peoples on a joint event such as this. I would, at the same time, encourage all Barents states to even make stronger efforts in prioritizing participation at such events, to make sure that high level representatives will have the opportunity to hear the views of indigenous peoples in decisionmaking processes.

Consulting indigenous peoples ought to be a natural, yet mandatory, in these processes, to make sure the principle of free, prior and informed consent is safeguarded before implementing any project of plan that will affect the livelihoods of indigenous peoples. Consultation also imply solid democratic assemblies and organisations, providing indigenous peoples a free and independent voice in every national state, in which they reside. Any laws preventing dialogue and international cooperation represent obstacles for the development of indigenous peoples' communities. Indigenous peoples have the right to organize in whatever form suits them, without fearing prosecution or negative consequences.

The past two years have represented challenges for indigenous peoples in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, and for the dialogue between indigenous peoples and state authorities. Both Finland and Norway have ignored the advice of the Sámi Parliaments in Finland and Norway, and the local inhabitants of the Deatnu/Tana valley, to discard the Agreement on fishing in the border river of Deatnu. On behalf of the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples, I call on national states to enhance the dialogue between indigenous peoples and authorities in all levels, and include indigenous peoples in decision-making processes, also in practice.

The Working Group of Indigenous Peoples welcomes the work of the Working Group on Tourism, as this is among the fastest growing industries in indigenous peoples' communities. The Barents Euro-Arctic Region have a lot to offer visitors, and we are happy to invite visitors into our culture and community. However, respect of local culture and indigenous peoples' culture and traditions must be crucial in any development of products for the tourism industry. Sacred spots and places must be treated with respect, symbols and cultural expressions likewise. Indigenous peoples have the right to determine use of our culture, and cultural appropriation must be avoided. On behalf of the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples, I call on the member states to promote original and authentic indigenous tourism businesses.

The hunt for natural resources affect indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region make their living out of natural resources, and the earth and water. Reindeer husbandry and farming depend on grazing land, fisheries depend on healthy, clean eco-systems in the sea and fjords. Mining industry in grazing areas, in Kvalsund, in Gállok, in Utsjoki, in the Kola Peninsula, in all four member states, represent a threat to the reindeer herders and their livelihood. Wind power plants in other grazing areas, the same. Disposing mining waste in a fjord is something only a handful of countries still do. Yet Norway insists on being one of the five. On behalf of the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples, I call on the Barents Member States to enhance the efforts to fight climate change and improve environmental standards. I call on the Member states to respect indigenous peoples' rights to a healthy and sustainable livelihood based on our traditions.

The incoming BEAC Chair has a history of emphasizing environmental issues, and the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples welcomes a continued effort for a sustainable environment in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, and we look forward to further fruitful cooperation and dialogue.