

**Your Excellencies,
Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is a great honour for me as the Chairman of the Sami Parliament in Sweden to welcome you all to the Arctic Parliamentarian conference here in Kiruna. We Sami call this city Giron – which means the city of the ptarmigan (fjällripa).

You have just been welcomed to Sweden by the Speaker of the Swedish parliament - Mr Björn von Sydow - and I want to extend this welcome to traditional Sámi territory which includes parts of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia.

We Sami are one people united through our common history, culture, language and land areas. The Sami are the indigenous people of this territory with roots that stretch back to the first lineage of people along the Arctic coast. The Sami people have prospered in their settlements long before today's national borders were established.

The Sami territory and the Sami people have due to different circumstances in the past been divided between four national states. The integration of the Sami territory to these national states followed the practise of colonization, where the primitive indigenous people presumed to be a vanishing race. This colonization has caused tremendous problems – a past that we still have to deal with, politically and in our daily lives.

On the other hand this past has been the mother of a lot of political creativity and has created a political mobilization among the Sami people. Local and national organisations have been founded and Sami institutions, like the Sami Parliaments have been established.

As a people in four countries the cross border contacts and co-operation has been a question of survival. The Sami Parliaments co-operation started 2nd of March 2000 when the Sámi Parliamentary Council was established. The Sámi Parliamentary Council is a cooperative body representing the Sámi Parliaments in Norway, Finland and Sweden. The Sami people in Russia attend as observers. The Councils purpose is to work on issues affecting Sámi across national boundaries, for example issues concerning the Sámi languages, education, research and industrial development. One of the goals is also to coordinate the Sámi voice in regional and international affairs. The co-ordination and cohesion of Sámi politics in Sweden, Norway and Finland is also developing. The governments Sweden, Norway, Finland and the Sámi Parliaments working to towards ratification of a Nordic Sámi Convention in order to harmonised the Sámi Policies in this three countries.

The establishment of the city Kiruna and the future of this town – that just have celebrated its 100 years anniversary- is an example of the experience of colonization and the meeting between the Europeans and the Sami people. Already in the mid 1700 century the Swedish Lord Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna said "in Lapland we have our India" when he was discussing about to get access to rich mineral deposits and other recourses in the Sami territory. When a British company started to exploit the ore deposit in Kiruna, Swedish politicians and industrialists often talked about the "land of future". In this future the indigenous peoples was of course not included.

In the beginning of the 21 century, we still can hear the words from these statements when politicians, bureaucrats and investors talk about gas, oil and other recourses in the Sámi and indigenous territories in the Arctic. . The echoes from those who once predicted that the civilisation and development will wipe out the indigenous peoples

and cultures are however fading away. The vision about an indigenous homeland and the concept of the new frontier are still competing.

My understanding is that the vision of the Arctic as homeland is gaining acceptance at same time as the rights of indigenous peoples are reaching recognition.

The United Nations General Assembly will properly adopt a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples in end of this year. This decision will be a breakthrough for all indigenous peoples and a start for a new partnership between indigenous peoples and the members of the United Nations. Remarkable to note is that Canada and Russia was the only countries that voted against adoption of the declaration when the Human Right Council in July 2006 decided to recommend the United Nations General Assembly to adopt the declaration.

There are still many challenges and questions related to resource utilization, rights to land and water and self-determination. This is both sensitive politically and complicated legally. In Norway there is an example of how these issues can be solved. In year 2005 was a historical compromise made concerning management of Finnmark county. The content of the compromise was that a new administration was founded with the Sámi Parliament as the main partner. On the Finnish, Swedish and Russian side questions related to ownership of indigenous lands and managements of land and recourses are still unsolved. Sweden and Finland have also received severe critique in different UN bodies concerning both because lack progress in recognising indigenous rights to land and resources. The Swedish, Finnish and Russian political system needs inspiration and good examples in this respect and Conferences of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region could serve as forum for this exchange of views and explorations of avenues.

Before I exceed my time limit for my statement I can't avoid mention impacts of the climate driven changes of the ecosystems in the Arctic. Indigenous communities are facing major economic and culture impacts of a warming Arctic. For some

indigenous peoples their future is literally melting under their feet's. The consequences are fast becoming more visible and greatly influencing the living conditions of the indigenous peoples in the Arctic. The governments in the Arctic region and the European Union, the standing committee of parliamentarians of the Arctic region and other relevant bodies must find common strategy to act promptly.

Finally I want to stress that the governments, indigenous peoples and political systems as a whole both need inspiration and good examples in this respect. It is important that you all Arctic parliamentarians work with protecting the indigenous people's rights, and developing the indigenous people's society, culture, language and traditional industries. All people in the Arctic region need visions for the future!

I wish you good luck with the conference and a pleasant visit here in Kiruna!