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Indigenous conference in Nordic countries opens with UN expert taking part



Special Rapporteur James Anaya

14 April 2010 – A conference of indigenous representatives and State officials from all the European Nordic countries opened in Finland today with a United Nations expert focusing on issues ranging from the status of Sami self-determination to education and language.

The Sami of Northern Europe are the indigenous people in the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Demographic patterns make it difficult to give exact numbers but there are at least 30,000 in Norway, about 20,000 in Sweden, and just over 7,000 in Finland. Some 2,000 Sami live in the Russian Kola Peninsula.

"I believe the visit [to the conference] will provide a unique and valuable opportunity for consultation and dialogue regarding issues throughout the Sápmi region," said UN Special Rapporteur on indigenous people, James Anaya, ahead of the gathering.

An independent, unpaid expert, he is mandated by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to monitor the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people.

The three-day conference in Rovaniemi, Finland, will give Mr. Anaya the opportunity to hold open discussions on issues ranging from the status of Sami self-determination and the right to land, water and natural resources in the Sápmi region to the situation of children and youth, with a particular focus on education

and language. He will also assess the various contributions by Nordic governments on indigenous issues to the UN human rights bodies.

He will hold both joint and separate meetings with indigenous non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governmental representatives and the Sami parliaments, after which he will issue a report on the human rights situation of the Sami people.

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