

**ANU INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE WORLD DIALOGUE;
ADDRESS ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT OF FINLAND ON 4 MAY 2005,
MRS ANNELI PUURA-MÄRKÄLÄ, AMBASSADOR OF FINLAND**

Dear Vice Chancellor Chubb, Professor Dodson, President of the Finnish Sami parliament Mr Aikio, Director of the Norwegian Saami University College Mr Keskitalo, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me greatest pleasure to participate in this ANU Indigenous People's of the World Dialogue representing the Finnish Government. I am happy that the ANU and its **National Centre for Indigenous Studies, National Institute of Social Sciences and Law as well as National Europe Centre** have welcomed the Sami representatives from Finland and Norway so warmly to visit Canberra and participate in this dialogue. The trip from the Sami Homelands of the Northern parts of Finland and Norway to Canberra could not be any longer, but themes and issues with the indigenous Sami population in the North have many essential similarities with the topical issues here "down under" in Australia.

Let me first recognize that we are in the Ngunnawal indigenous land.

Let me congratulate professor Dodson for the brilliant initiative of the Sami Dialogue and thank him, his colleagues and staff for organizing the Sami Dialogue and other programme for the Sami participants of the Dialogue.

As a representative of the Finnish Government I would like to focus in my brief address on the basic legislative points on the status and rights of Sami people in Finland.

1. The area inhabited by the Sami extends from central parts of Norway and Sweden over the northernmost parts of Finland and Russia, to the Kola Peninsula. There are in total 75.000 to 100.000 Sami living in this area, of which about 7.500 in Finland. More than a half of the Sami population in Finland live in the Sami Homeland. The concept of the Sami Homeland is defined in the national legislation.

2. The Constitution of Finland (Section 17, subsection 3) guarantees the Sami, as an indigenous people "the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture".

3. The Constitution (Section 121(4)) also provides that the Sami have cultural and linguistic self-government within the Sami Homeland. Culture includes also their traditional means of livelihood, such as reindeer herding, hunting and fishing.

4. The Act on the Sami Parliament stipulates that the Finnish authorities have an obligation to negotiate with the Sami parliament in all far-reaching and important measures which may directly and in a specific way affect the status of the Sami as an indigenous people and which concern matters in the Sami Homeland, as specified in the Act.

5. The hearing of the representatives of the Sami in the Finnish Parliament when considering a legislative proposal or another matter which especially concerns the Sami is provided in the Rules of the Procedure of the Finnish Parliament.

6. As to the rights of the Sami population progress has been achieved particularly in the linguistic rights of Sami, in 2004 in form of **a new law that aims at improving the possibilities to use Sami language with authorities.** The new law that was based upon a detailed proposal of the Sami Par-

liament, guarantees the right of the Sami, under the Constitution of Finland and in compliance with international agreements binding on Finland, to maintain and develop their language and to use their own language (Inari, Skolt and North Sami) in court and before other authorities.

7. Finland has not ratified the ILO Convention No 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries. The Finnish Government is aiming at finding a solution to the land issue that still forms an obstacle for the ratification. The Finnish Government, particularly **the Ministry of Justice, is actively working on this complicated issue to remove the remaining obstacles for its ratification.** Any solution should naturally be acceptable to both the Government and the Sami. Mr Pekka Aikio is concentrating mainly on this issue in his presentation today.

8. Within the framework of the institutional Nordic cooperation the Nordic ministers responsible for Sami matters together with the Presidents of the three Sami Parliaments are cooperating actively. One of the projects of this cooperation is the work on **a Nordic convention on the Sami** that was initiated in the 1980's. **The joint expert group of the three Nordic governments and the national Sami Parliaments is actively preparing a draft Nordic convention on the Sami.** The proposal is expected some time this year. The government of Finland wishes that the proposal could form a basis for speedy negotiations and signature as well as ratification of the Convention.

I am particularly happy that we have been able to organize this event as a common Nordic effort involving the Sami representatives from Norway and Finland but also Sweden and Russia have been involved in the preparations and participate in the event.