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STATEMENT ON THE SAMI PEOPLE'S DAY

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad to the Permanent Council  
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Madame Chair,

Today we observe the Sami People's Day. The Sami people are the indigenous people mainly inhabiting the Arctic area called Sápmi, which today encompasses parts of northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia.

The Norwegian Sami Act of 1987 codified rights for the Sami People, including the establishment of the Sami parliament. Since 1988, the Sami people has been granted a constitutional right to develop their language, culture and society. In 1997, King Harald V recognized that Norway is founded on the territory of two nations, the Norwegian and the Sami, and he apologised for the wrongs committed during the period of forced assimilation.

The Sami People's Day is a cause for celebration. Today, increasingly more Sami are proud of their heritage and language. The establishment of the Sami Parliament, and several other institutions aimed to secure and develop Sami culture and Sami languages, has contributed to increasing awareness and knowledge about the Sami people, both in society at large as well as among the Sami themselves.

Toward the end of the 19th century, the Norwegian government introduced a policy of assimilation of the Sami people and other minorities. The discrimination against the Sami People had many serious consequences for the Sami languages and culture. As a

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result, many Sami families and societies came to reject their own Sami identity and lose their command of the Sami languages.

In 2017, the Norwegian Parliament established a commission to examine Norway's former assimilation policy. Its mandate and composition has been determined in close consultation with the Sami parliament and relevant minority organisations. The commission is expected to deliver its report in 2022. We will continue to safeguard the interests of the Sami, and our national minorities, as the commission continues to work.

Dialogue and consultations between the Sami people and state authorities are key to mutual knowledge and understanding. In 2005, Norway formalised the right of indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making processes through an agreement on Procedures for Consultations between State Authorities and the Sami Parliament (Sámediggi).

The consultation process ensures that the government is well acquainted with the Sami's views and interests before making a decision that affects them. While the government always endeavors to reach agreement, we recognise that sometimes no agreement is to be found.

Our government is preparing additional statutory rules, which will further strengthen and clarify the Sami people's right to be consulted in matters that may affect them directly. A draft law is currently under public consultation, which will conclude at the end of this month.

The nationwide celebration of the Sami People's Day raises the visibility of Sami culture and languages across Norway and contributes to increased awareness among the public. In doing so, it aids our efforts to strengthen our indigenous culture and languages.