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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[03 February 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change in the Arctic

In the arctic, indigenous peoples live under growing threat to their livelihood because of climate change, expansion of extractive industry and clean energy projects. The Arctic Ocean is navigable for a longer time of the year, making it not only attractive for commercial fishery and tourism including more and more cruise ships but for military interests namely of the USA, Russia and China as well. Thawing Permafrost increases the availability of resources and thus the number of projects of extractive industries. The profit prospect of oil, gas, coal, copper, gems as well as so-called clean energy projects (wind parks) and others is promising. Conflicts with indigenous peoples' basic rights already exist and will increase unless the peoples affected are equal part of decision-making, which is based on international agreements like the ILO Convention 169 as an example.

In Greenland, melting sea ice has negative consequences for self-sustainable indigenous fishery and hunting of narwhal, seal, walrus or polar bear because the hunters need solid ice for hunting and for transportation on winter roads. Sea ice coverage in 2018 was reportedly at a historical low, according to the National Snow and Ice Data Centre. There is an increased interest in exploring natural resources in Greenland. Currently there are 6 exploitation licenses, 61 exploration licenses, 9 prospecting licenses, and 56 small-scale licenses around the country. In Narsaq, in Southern Greenland, the Rare Earth Elements (REE) project by the Australian-based Greenland Minerals and Energy (GME) is of great local concern due to the environmental consequences of the potential open-pit mine. The Narsaq area is known for sheep farming, cattle ranching and agriculture. One of the challenges with the mine would be how to manage the tailings and the wastewater the concern being that the waste products will end up in the river and the town. To others, however, the mine represents the prospect of new jobs and much needed development. Therefore, internal conflicts in the Inuit community are to be feared. For Denmark, and internationally, the main concern seems to be the 12.5 % Chinese ownership of the mine and the geopolitical implications this could have. Greenland has become a cause of disagreement for Denmark, Russia, China and the USA; first because of the rich resources, second because of Greenland's geostrategic location. It is of utmost importance that the indigenous Greenlander are able to control and decide upon their future and the development of their territory. Otherwise, they could fall victim to geopolitical processes they cannot influence.

In Russia in a decree, President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian firms in 2018 to boost cargo traffic on the Northern Sea Route to an annual 80m tons by 2024. Ambitious energy co-operation deals were signed with India in Vladivostok, in Russia's far east, in October. One centers on a big open-cast coal mining project in the Taymyr Peninsula, in the far north of central Siberia. The area is rich in high-quality coking coal (anthracite), used to make steel and aluminum. Putin is championing the expansion of fossil fuel projects in that wilderness. Forty peoples are officially recognized in Siberia as the indigenous minority peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East. The reindeer are the basis of the livelihood for most. The herds are not only threatened by climate change and extractive industries but as well by poaching. In 2018, in an increasing number of cases, Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) were no longer made publicly available. The same was true for information on the place and time of public hearings, despite provisions in Russian environmental legislation on the procedure for public consultation during the EIAs. Consequently, such hearings mostly took place without participation from the parties most affected by the impacts. At the end of 2018, Russia and Germany were jointly pursuing the construction of another gas pipeline through the Baltic Sea, which would mostly transport natural gas extracted at Gazprom's Bovanenkovo operations on the Yamal peninsula. This is home to the world's largest nomadic reindeer herding community. The Yamal area, a region the size of France, is a closed "border zone"

and can only be entered with secret service permission, so that information on the actual situation of indigenous communities in gas extraction areas is extremely hard to come by, while local indigenous organizations' activities are closely monitored by the state.

In Sápmi a pioneering court decision on 23 January 2020 gave the Girjas community in Sweden the right to decide about hunting and fishing permissions on their territory. This decision of the Supreme Court gave indigenous common law priority over jurisdiction and should be exemplary for rules and regulations concerning indigenous decision making in Sápmi and in the Arctic. In contrast, mega wind power parks have been and still are being established in Sámi territory in all three Nordic countries; all are controversial from a Sámi human rights and environmental perspective. They support the clean energy needs of the non-indigenous Europe and threaten to destroy the reindeer pastures and the trails on which the reindeer move. The Sami way of life as a whole is in danger.

The Storheia wind park in Fosen, Norway, is one of the most recently established mega parks, with construction on-going. The Norwegian Petroleum and Energy Ministry has given the permits to proceed with the 288 megawatt (MW) Storheia wind park, which is part of Europe's largest onshore wind power project being developed by the Fosen Vind consortium. In December 2018, the CERD requested Norway to suspend the project so it could examine a complaint that the project would be harmful for Sámi reindeer herding. The ministry has stated that they will reply to the CERD correspondence but will disregard the request for interim measures as the project has already acquired all the necessary domestic legal permits and is almost finished.

Society for Threatened Peoples therefore calls upon the members of the United Nations Human Rights Council:

- to initiate negotiations for an international Arctic Treaty establishing the rules and regulations for extractive industries in the Arctic under the premise of the protection of indigenous peoples' inherent human and territorial rights and indigenous peoples' right to self-determination.
- to urge the governments of Sweden, Finland and Russia to ratify the Convention 169 of International Labour Organization (ILO 169).
- to urge the governments of Sweden, Finland and Russia to respect the rules and regulations of the UN-Declaration on Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), especially the right to free prior informed consent
- to strengthen sovereign indigenous bodies like the Inuit Circumpolar Council ICC, Raipon and the Sami councils.