

# **THE FOURTH WORLD REINDEER HERDERS' CONGRESS**

**Kautokeino, 30 March 2009**

**Your excellencies, president Khorolya of the WRH, president Olli of the Norwegian Sami parliament, dear reindeer herders of the world.**

**It is a great honour for me to open the fourth world congress of the association of world reindeer herders here in Guovdageaidnu-Kautokeino- of which we are proud to say that it is indeed one of the most important centres for traditional and modern reindeer husbandry in the world.**

**Allow me, on behalf of foreign minister Støre and the Norwegian government to congratulate you with this important event. I also convey their best wishes for the congress and your work.**

**It is quite impressive to see so many representatives from so many regions and countries gathered together here in Finnmark to participate in the world congress and its extensive cultural and social programme this week before our Eastern holiday.**

**And let me repeat the words: Tradition and modernity. I think these key words are the clue to the success of the work of your organization, WRH.**

**Indigenous peoples possess an important and unparalleled body of knowledge on nature, the climate, the environment and traditional practices. They are stewards of cultural values and have specialised knowledge of ways of making a living under marginal conditions in subarctic conditions.**

**Reindeer husbandry is one of these ways. It is based on invaluable traditional knowledge and skill, with more than 100 000 people from 20 different ethnicities, living from it all over the circumpolar area. I have been told that representatives from 28 regions and nine countries are present here today.**

**It is extremely important to preserve this knowledge you possess, a knowledge that must be passed over to future generations of reindeer herders.**

**At the same time we see that many reindeer herders are very apt at using modern technology. And that is natural, and a necessity to secure further development of a sound and sustainable reindeer husbandry. And a very important aspect is that it should be possible to live well from it, to lead a normal life with all the benefits of modern life.**

**It is very positive that there is a growing demand for reindeer meat, and that this delicacy now can be found in the most prestigious gourmet restaurants in many countries. The main goal here must be to secure that those who work in the field also should reap the harvest and earn a normal living. The WRH is an organization that can further these interests, being active on the international stage, and maybe even acting as an international trade union for reindeer herders.**

**Climate change is the biggest challenge facing humanity. The international financial crisis will pass, but the damage to the environment will be with us for generations. The Arctic climate is warming rapidly and much larger changes are foreseen. The sea ice is retreating, the Greenland icesheet is melting and the permafrost is thawing. The impacts will be dramatic and they will affect the rest of the world through further global warming and rising sea-levels. Long-term preservation of the Arctic as we know it today depends on a strategy to reduce global emissions of greenhouse gases to a sustainable level.**

**We know that particularly indigenous peoples are hit by climate changes, and especially those who traditionally hunt on the sea ice, which is now shrinking or disappearing all together. And we know that the consequences of this also are felt by reindeer herders.**

**We all have to work together to face the climate changes. Mitigation, reduction of CO2 emissions and pollutants are crucial. Another aspect is that human beings have to adapt to the new realities and changing nature conditions. And in connexion with this the traditional knowledge is of particular value. Whether we want it or not, we have to undertake adaptation measures. The EALAT-project within the framework of the Arctic Council and IPY is focusing on this aspect.**

**The Arctic Council, which is playing an increasingly significant role, is the only truly circumpolar organization. Norway is presently chairing the Council until the 6<sup>th</sup>**

**Ministerial meeting in Tromsø on 29 April, when the chairmanship will be handed over to Denmark. Norway has stressed the need to focus on Arctic climate change and topics related to the Arctic ocean.**

**The continuing work under the Arctic Council to develop environmental standards for the exploitation of natural resources is extremely valuable. The fact that six indigenous organizations from the whole circumpolar area are permanent participants in the Arctic Council is a strong asset for the organization. And we are also very pleased to have the WRH as an observer. People living and working in the area know what it is all about.**

**The Arctic Council is a forum where the voice of the indigenous peoples are heard. It is an important forum for discussing the consequences of human activities, as industrial development, in areas where indigenous peoples have exercised their traditional ways of living.**

**On 1 December 2006 the Norwegian government launched its High North Strategy. Development of the High North and cooperation with our High North neighbouring countries and regions has been the number one priority for our government. Just a few weeks ago we launched the follow up to this strategy, foreseeing further focusing on the High North with broad participation of government, national, regional and local**

**institutions and individuals. Indigenous issues have a prominent place. New efforts and new financing will be provided to safeguard the livelihoods, traditions, and cultures of indigenous peoples. We will particularly concentrate on education, knowledge and competence building, and on economic activity based on traditional knowledge. Our Sami institutions are encouraged to take an active part in international cooperation.**

**In 1993 the Barents cooperation was established. It was a new and challenging venture of regional cooperation between countries where people before had looked across the border and saw an enemy. This has changed totally today. During these sixteen years relations have been normalized, and there is an active ongoing cooperation in a wide range of fields. Indigenous issues have also been of great importance in the Barents cooperation, where the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples (WGIP) is working both with the national and the regional level. One of the greatest successes of the Barents cooperation, is the people-to-people cooperation, that has created a lot of new meeting places and networks.**

**Network-building and cooperation across institutions and national borders is the way to the future. This was early recognized by the founding fathers of the WRH, Norwegian reindeer owners who already in 1990 visited their colleagues in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). And the relations between Norway and Yakutia are special and have been kept up and developed, while still more reindeer herding societies have been involved in the cooperation-network. This later led to the establishment of WRH in 1997.**

**Those who initiated the work are still active. I would not say that they are old men and women, but at least they are nearly 20 years older than when they started. I hear that a new generation is ready to continue the work and that they now engage themselves actively in the WRH. That shows that the organization is authoritative and important.**

**The Norwegian Foreign Ministry has supported this process from the outset. And we must recommend the innovative work of Johan Mathis Turi, Odd Erling Smuk and their colleagues. During these years they have managed to gather reindeer herders from an enormous area, they have compiled unique knowledge of reindeer herding, produced interesting reports on sustainable reindeer husbandry and not least, brought reindeer herders from distant places together. They have managed to travel to places where very few Westerners have been before in search of reindeer herders, through frozen tundras, mosquito infested marshlands and even on strenuous horse back rides in the far away mountains of Mongolia. The result of this is i.a. the fourth world congress in Kautokeino.**

**This is a true people-to-people success. The network you know have could not have been made by others than people involved in and knowing reindeer herding.**

**We are satisfied that Norwegian authorities have supported this work. It eventually also lead to the establishment of the International Center for Reindeer Husbandry here in Kautokeino, which opened in 2005, a center that will work to further develop a sustainable husbandry able to face the challenges of modern development.**

**I wish you all good luck and hope for a bright future for reindeer husbandry and reindeer herders.**

**Thank you for the attention**