**Statement by Per-Olof Nutti, President of the Sámi Parliament in Sweden at EMRIP virtual regional meeting for the Arctic, Central and Eastern Europe, Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia - 2 December 2020**

**“The impact of COVID-19 on the rights of indigenous peoples under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”**



[Introduction in Sámi language]

First of all, I would like to acknowledge those who have passed away because of the pandemic and express my heartfelt compassion to their loved ones.

My name is Ellá Nilsa Biete Ber Ovllá and I am the President of the Sámi Parliament in Sweden.

There is no official, disaggregated statistical data on Sámi as data collection based on ethnicity is prohibited by law in Sweden. This makes it challenging to present a comprehensive picture of Sámi well-being, economic, social and cultural development. During the ongoing Pandemic this lack of data is even more problematic. We cannot fully evaluate the health impacts of Covid-19 and how the pandemic is and will continue to affect our rights. In terms of economic, cultural and political rights I will highlight some examples.

Sámi economy is generally made up of local, small-scale, family based companies. However, the economic measures undertaken by States are mainly tailored to credit-based, large-scale companies. As such, most Sámi businesses are not helped by these measures. As a consequence, we already see family businesses with long history closing down and declaring bankruptcy. The Sámi Parliament has received some funding to support cultural workers. This is not enough. Additional financial support to reindeer herding and other livelihoods is needed.

We are also concerned how the current Pandemic has forced us into the virtual world, undermining democratic values like participation and freedom of assembly. Limiting our self-determination and governance structures. We have had to cancel sessions of the Parliament. We are also forced to postpone our preparations for the Sámi truth commission as we currently cannot hold consultation meetings with the Sámi people.

On the other hand, digital tools have allowed us to connect and cooperate in new ways. For example, it has enabled us to reach the Sámi youth. We see an increase in the registration of young voters to the Sámi Parliament electoral roll ahead of the upcoming election next year.

It has also provided new platforms to build nation-to-nation relationships.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought us many challenges. But it also gives us opportunities to show how our values and ways of life can help restore broken connections and bring well-being for peoples and nature.

Thank you! Giitu!