Statement by Greenland at the sixteenth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at the United Nations in New York on 26 April 2017

April 29, 2017

"Thank you Madam Chair.

The indigenous knowledge system in Greenland has been accumulated over generations as our people have interacted with the natural surroundings in the Arctic. Our knowledge encompasses governance, social and family institutions, language, naming and classification systems, natural resource use and conservation practices, rituals and world view. For centuries, we have relied on this knowledge which constitutes the foundation upon which our people have thrived and survived.

The Government of Greenland recognizes the value, importance and contribution of indigenous knowledge systems to critical themes such as biodiversity. We believe that diverse knowledge systems including physical and natural sciences, social sciences and humanities as well as indigenous knowledge systems are important for understanding and addressing complex challenges and opportunities facing our society and country. For this reason, we seek to strengthen the contribution of indigenous knowledge.

The Government of Greenland has made a central effort to contribute to the Convention on Biodiversity Article 8(j) through a community-based project called PISUNA which aims at improving the management of resources in Greenland by establishing a process for indigenous knowledge and environmental observations to be integrated into decision-making for natural resource management.

The process is locally-led with Local Resource Councils established at the community level comprising hunters, fishermen and other individuals with an interest in the environment who decide what will be observed based on the relevance for their community.

Observations by the PISUNA communities primarily focus on terrestrial and marine mammals, fish, and birds, but also include sea ice cover. Every three months the observations and interpretations of each attribute are collated and discussed by the Local Resource Council, including the trend of a particular resource compared to the previous year (e.g. increasing, no change, decreasing) and the recommended management actions on the basis of the observations.

Suggested management actions have included changes to hunting and fishing seasons for certain species, changes to quotas and amendments to local laws and bylaws such as imposing restrictions on fishing methods and allowable equipment. This information is submitted to the local authority to take action or to pass on to the central government, depending on the appropriate decision-making level. The observations made by the local communities are stored in a web-based application - PISUNA-net where they are publicly available and can be searched.

What we have learnt in Greenland is that community-based monitoring approaches can realize various benefits through cross-fertilizing scientific and indigenous knowledge to increase capacity for resource management, to support sound adaptive management and achieve data collection over a wide area and on continual basis which is impossible through conventional monitoring.

The integration of indigenous knowledge into management regimes remains a challenge in many countries as highlighted at the fifteenth session of the Permanent Forum that recommended Member States to protect traditional medicine and knowledge, and secure the rights of indigenous peoples to intellectual property. This is also linked to the fact that indigenous ways of knowing are disappearing as a result of the ongoing devaluing of indigenous reality and a loss of the acquired wisdom of elders.

Given the rapid environmental changes being experienced around the world including in the Arctic region, integration of indigenous knowledge is a valuable resource in our efforts to improve decision-making processes in terms of sustainable development, climate change mitigation and adaption alongside and on an equal footing to scientific knowledge, facilitating locally meaningful management decisions that have a high likelihood of having a sustained impact.

The Government of Greenland therefore recommends that States ensure the recognition, continued vitality and protection from misappropriation of indigenous knowledge and recognizes the link between indigenous knowledge and biodiversity conservation and natural resource management, climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Thank you for your attention Madam Chair"