

**Press Release**  
**«The Year 2005 – The Indigenous Peoples’ Year in the Barents Co-operation»**

On behalf of the Barents Indigenous Peoples the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples BEAR together with the organizers is happy to welcome you to the opening of a great event – «The Year 2005 – the Indigenous Peoples’ Year in the Barents Co-operation»!

The Barents Co-operation is known for its being aimed at the contacts’ development between people and admittance of indigenous peoples’ special role in the history and culture of the Region. The indigenous peoples are sure that co-operation development, prosperity and well being in the Region are achieved only when indigenous peoples’ interests are taken into account.

The Saami of four countries – Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden, the Nenets of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, and the Vepsians of Karelia are represented in the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples. The Working Group has been given an advisory status to the Barents Council and the Regional Council.

Aiming at deeper and equal participation of indigenous peoples in the Barents Co-operation, the Working Group initiated holding the Indigenous Peoples’ Year in the Barents Co-operation. It was supported by the Regional Council, which proclaimed the year 2005 as «The Indigenous Peoples’ Year in the Barents Co-operation».

The Council of Senior Officials of the Barents Council noted that «The Indigenous Peoples’ Year in the Barents Co-operation» is of multilateral character and great public and political importance for the whole Barents Region. The Year events are directed at preservation and development of culture and traditional way of living of the peoples, harmonization of interethnic relationships, formation and development in the society tolerant consciousness, respect for long-termed traditions of friendly co-living and co-operation between the peoples.

The indigenous peoples in the Barents Co-operation are the equal citizens of their countries but have their own priorities in the organization of their way of living, which should be taken into account by the authorities of all levels. The Governments of the countries of the Barents Co-operation should aim at formation of common policy towards the indigenous peoples and be responsible for their future in accordance with the accepted international legislation on the rights of indigenous peoples.

In December 2004 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming a Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People, which major goal is «the further strengthening of international co-operation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous peoples in such areas as culture, education, health, human rights, the environment and social and economic development» and invited Governments to ensure that its objectives are implemented on the basis of consultation and collaboration with indigenous peoples.

The Working Group hopes the Indigenous Peoples’ Year in the Barents Co-operation will be a successful beginning of the Second Decade and the basis for focusing attention of the Governments of the countries – members of the Barents Co-operation, regional and local authorities, organizations and institutions on indigenous peoples’ issues.

The Motto of the Year «Learning by Co-operation» will give a new impulse to the Barents Co-operation. Having understood that we all are people, unique, bright, and industrious, we will live in peace and consent, facing the troubles openly, knowing that we are not alone, we are together in our Barents Region – Our Common Homeland.

**02 February 2005, Kirkenes, Norway**