

## Opening

Deputy Chair Marit Myrvoll, Centre for Sámi studies, University of Tromsø

*Bures boahtin!*

It gives me great pleasure to be able to welcome you all to Tromsø, to the University and to the annual Forum Conference. A special welcome to all of you who have traveled from afar to come here and share your knowledge and experience with us. There will be speakers from several continents on this year's program; a warm welcome to our national and local contributors and participants as well.

This is the tenth time the Forum Conference is being held, so we are having a minor milestone anniversary this year. The Forum for Development Cooperation with Indigenous Peoples is financed by NORAD (The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) and this enables the Forum to hold this conference every year.

In the course of the past ten years, the conference has become an important venue and meeting place for researchers, people working in the field of development and Sámi organizations active in cooperative projects with indigenous peoples in the southern hemisphere. The aim of the Forum is to contribute to strengthening Norwegian aid policy towards indigenous peoples and, as such, the conference is an important venue for raising and discussing issues of vital concern to indigenous peoples. Today's challenge is to ensure that important and constructive suggestions from the conference reach policy-makers and thus make a difference for those in need of assistance. Conference topics have spanned a wide range of concerns, but all have focused on indigenous peoples, whatever the subject of debate has been—be it competence building, the UN system, migration and urbanization, political and cultural rights, natural resources or climate change. All the time it has been a permanent concern to clearly demonstrate to what end and how indigenous people themselves have been involved and empowered in political processes that concern themselves.

The focus of this year's conference will be on violent conflicts, cease-fires and peace treaties. This is a reality that is unknown to us living in Sápmi. We are not engaged in a rights debate where our arguments are met with soldiers and weapons, and where killings, rapes and pillaging of our homes are common. Nonetheless, we cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that these things are happening. It is an everyday reality for many indigenous people across the world. Indigenous people have become vulnerable as a group due to the appetites of governments, hungry for territories and natural resources. Thus, there is ample reason why the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples emphasizes, even in the preamble, that areas inhabited by indigenous people must be demilitarized.

That we Sámi live in a peaceful corner of the world makes it all the more incumbent upon us to put these issues on the agenda. During this conference, we will probably hear stories that we find shocking. It may seem unbearable to have to listen to such stories but then we have to bear in mind: it is worse to have to experience it. We owe it to all who have to live with the consequences of violent conflicts, to become engaged in a constructive

manner in order to put an end to it. The goal must be a predictable, safe, and dignified life for all.

With these reflections, let me one more time welcome everyone to the conference. I hope you all will have an enjoyable and rewarding stay. Before I call the Chair of the Forum, Professor Tone Bleie, I cannot let the moment pass without thanking the Forum Board for their commitment. I also want to thank the administrative staff at the Centre for Sámi Studies, led by Terje Lilleeng who has the day-to-day responsibility during—and for the following-up work between—the conferences. Many thanks to all of you!

It is a great pleasure to wish everyone a good conference!