



Opening session

Gerd Bjørhovde, Pro-Rector at the University of Tromsø

For the University of Tromsø it has been an honour and a privilege to host the Forum Conference since the year 2000, and with the Centre for Sámi Studies doing all the hard, practical work. The Centre deserves credit for their great work as conference organisers – thank you!

The University of Tromsø is a small university, with approximately 6,500 students. That is very small by international standards, but ours is still a “full” university, offering degrees and studies in all the classical subjects and disciplines. This means that we have to stretch our resources – and inventiveness – to their utmost limit at times. But the study of indigenous questions and indigenous cultures, and particularly the Sámi culture and language, has been a top priority from the very beginning.

We are particularly happy to welcome the State Secretary for International Development Anne Stenhammer as this year’s opening speaker. We are highly aware of how important it is to have the support of the central government in organising this kind of conference, and we appreciate your support very much.

I hope that this year’s Forum Conference will lead to the establishment of fruitful contacts and to significant new steps in the development of this important work. I see that Brazil and Bolivia are heavily represented in the program at this year’s conference, and I trust that there will be interesting opportunities for comparisons and discussions across continents and national borders. I have also noticed that there is a fairly big delegation from Guatemala here this year, made possible by the support of NORAD and the Embassy there. For the University of Tromsø this is of particular interest, since one of our Honorary Doctors is Rigoberta Menchu Túm, who has visited Tromsø on two occasions.

With these words, I would like to thank all of you who are making this conference possible, and I am pleased to declare the 2006 Forum Conference open!