**79th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women**

**Virtual day of general discussion on the rights of indigenous women and girls**

**“Equality and non-discrimination with a focus on indigenous women and girls and intersecting forms of discrimination”**

Thank you Chair,

I have the honor of delivering this statement on behalf of Denmark together with Greenland.

We welcome the Committee’s efforts to elaborate a general recommendation on the rights of indigenous women and girls. This presents a timely opportunity to counter the impacts of multiple and intersecting forms of vulnerability and discrimination on the rights of indigenous women and girls.

Indigenous peoples continue to be more vulnerable to the direct and indirect effects of COVID-19, which has threatened the health, wellbeing, and livelihoods of people globally and exposed and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities and discrimination. The effects of the pandemic is even more severe for indigenous women and girls. Yet even before it started, they already faced multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on, *inter alia,* class, ethnic origin and socioeconomic circumstances, as well as violations of their right to self-determination.

Indigenous women face significant barriers to their sexual and reproductive health and rights, such as a lack of sexual and reproductive health information and services, access to facilities and lack of supplies, such as contraceptives, poor quality services and, in many cases, legislation banning abortion services. This leads to increased risks of maternal mortality, disproportionate cases of teen pregnancies and child, early and forced marriages.

Moreover, indigenous women and girls face disproportionate risks of experiencing sexual- and gender-based violence. It has been estimated that more than one in three indigenous women are raped during their lifetime. Measures to prevent, protect and mitigate the consequences of all forms of violence against indigenous women and girls must be implemented. In this context support for indigenous women’s organizations and networks is vital as they are in the front lines of the response.

Ensuring the right of indigenous women and girls to decide freely over their own bodies is fundamental. However, to tackle the broader problem of discrimination against indigenous women and girls, we must ensure their full and equal participation in all aspects of social, economic and political life. For this to happen, some notable barriers must still be addressed.

A fundamental barrier to women and girls’ economic and social empowerment is the lack of access to quality education. A barrier which may be amplified for indigenous women and girls as they are often in particular vulnerable and marginalized situations. Enabling equal access to quality education requires abolishing discriminatory laws, practices and policies. This in turn will be key in giving all indigenous women and girls a better chance in life, empowering them to make their own decisions regarding their own bodies, to become part of the work force, of their community and in the general economic and social development of their countries; and thereby co-creating a society without discrimination against them.

Thank you.