

UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Ninth Session

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Agenda Item 8: Best practices and strategies for the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Intervention held by Runar Myrnes Balto, political advisor to the executive council of Sámi Parliament of Norway

Thank you Mr. Chair,

I speak on behalf of the Sámi Parliament of Norway, the Sámi Parliament of Finland and the Sámi Council.

We, the Sámi, are a borderless people, and our territories cover a vast geographical area within the states of Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. For the Sámi people this means that in the process of implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we have in effect four national processes. Yet, as one people we have collective rights across the existing state borders, including the right to maintain and develop cooperation in matters concerning cultural, political, economic and social issues, as expressed in Article 36 of the Declaration.

The Sámi people, being spread geographically, is in need of close cooperation over the borders and between the States, should our cultures, languages, customs and economic activities survive. Thus, we would like to make the case for cross-border cooperation as a strategy and a tool for the implementation of the Declaration.

The Sámi school in Sirbmá is an example of successful cross-border cooperation. Close to the border between Norway and Finland, Children from both sides of the border attend the school, allowing them to receive their education in the Sámi language. This school-cooperation gives the Sami children of the Upper Deatnu valley a sense of community and common Sami identity even if state borders cut through their homeland. For this best-practice cooperation to continue, the question of resource allocation and national curriculums connected to the dividing state borders, must be sorted.

Mr. Chair,

There are, however, many examples where the borders create great challenges for the Sámi people. One such example is the ongoing dispute between Norway and Sweden about the reindeer grazing land in border areas, known as the Reindeer Grazing Land Convention. In these areas there was already established Sámi reindeer herding when the borders were drawn, meaning that the reindeers

migrations routes cross the border. Due to the States' at times ill-advised attempts to manage Sámi reindeer herding, conflict has been created between Sámis on each side.

After long-lasting negotiations between the parties over how this issue might be solved, the process seems to have stalled. We would like to remind the States that this issue needs to be solved quickly in order to secure predictability and harmony between Sámis.

Mr. Chair,

One process that we believe might serve as a best practice in the future is the Nordic Sámi Convention. With the goal of making Sámi cross-border cooperation easier and harmonizing state policies, the states of Finland, Norway and Sweden and the Sámi Parliaments of these three countries have been negotiating since 2011. We have high expectations for what we can achieve through this convention, and we believe that it can be a substantial tool for the effective implementation of several of the Articles in the UNDRIP.

If the Sámi parliaments and the States succeed in these negotiations, it may create a road map for other States and Indigenous peoples that live across state borders.

Lastly, we would like to support the four recommendations given by the statement of New South Wales Aboriginal Land council on agenda item No 5 held earlier at this EMRIP session, regarding the Expert Study and Advice on the right to health.

Thank you Mr. Chair.