

Twelfth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

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Mr Chairman, distinguished panellists, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join this panel on behalf of the Finnish Sámi Youth Organization and to share information on the Sámi education in Finland.

Finnish school education earns top marks

First, some general remarks of the Finnish school education which has earned top marks. Numerous international comparisons, such as the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) study, have shown that Finnish school education is of the highest standard globally. High-quality education that is equal and free of charge has brought affluence, reinforced democracy and reduced disparities between regions and social groups.

Finland's success is largely explained by the school system (uniform comprehensive school for the entire age group), the professionalism of teachers and the autonomy of schools.

Only the core curricula are nationally prepared. The decentralised education system is based on locally formulated and implemented curricula that can respond to the individual needs of school students.

Language nests

In Finland all three Sámi languages are more or less endangered: Inari Sámi, spoken by about 600 persons, and Skolt Sámi, spoken by about the same number, are considered as particularly endangered languages. Language nests, that is language immersion day care centres, are widely considered to be the best solution for the revitalization of the Sámi languages at an early age. The nests are not only intended to teach the Sámi languages but also to preserve and revive the indigenous people's own language and culture. Language nest activities play a key role in preserving the Sámi language and culture in the current situation, where fewer than half of all Sámi people have learned Sámi as their first language. However, it has proved to be difficult to find and train staff.

Pre-school education

The Government supports the opportunities of Sámi-speaking pupils to participate in pre-school in their mother tongue.

In Finland the municipalities of the Sámi Homeland receive state subsidies for all costs incurred from arranging teaching in Sámi. This applies to pre-school education, too. All municipalities in the Sámi Homeland provide pre-school education in Sámi. Such education is arranged mainly in combined classes, where the two first class levels of the school attend basic education at the same time.

The appropriations granted by the National Board of Education for the production of teaching material in Sámi may also be used for pre-school material. The Sámi Parliament produces teaching

material in all three Sámi languages, also for pre-school education. The availability of all three Sámi language materials has been scarce, especially in Skolt Sámi language there are not enough authors of such material knowing the language, and skilled authors have not been found.

National core curriculum for Sámi-language instruction

According to the national core curriculum for basic education adopted by the National Board of Education, the instruction during basic education is based on Finnish culture, which has developed in interaction with e.g. indigenous cultures.

All municipalities arranging instruction in Sámi must prepare and adopt a curriculum for Sámi-language instruction, based on the national core curriculum. The national curriculum permits highlighting Sámi culture and local subjects in instruction but it does not obligate it.

According to the national core curriculum, Sámi-language instruction is given in North Sámi, Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi. The key instructional objective is to support pupils in their growth towards active bilingualism and multiculturalism.

The National Board of Education holds that it would be sensible to prepare a core curriculum for instruction in Sámi. The outcome of the cooperation between the Sámi Homeland municipalities would constitute a regional curriculum for instruction in Sámi.

Teaching in Sámi outside the Sámi Homeland

An increasing percentage of the Sámi in Finland reside outside the Sámi Homeland. Today 65 % of the Sámi under the age of 18 live outside the Sámi Homeland.

The constitutional right of the Sámi to their own language and culture also applies to the Sámi residing outside the Sámi Homeland. Unlike in respect of the day care of children, the Sámi Language Act does not obligate municipalities to arrange teaching of the Sámi language outside the Homeland. The legislation on education does not contain provisions on teaching of the language outside the Sámi Homeland.

Sámi may be taught outside the Sámi Homeland by virtue of a separate decision of the Ministry of Education. Educational institutions for pupils speaking Sámi may be granted government subsidies for this teaching, for the maximum of two lesson hours per week per teaching group.

Some municipalities have arranged distance teaching of Sámi on the Internet.

Education at universities and polytechnics – teacher education

Teacher education: The Giellagas Institute at the University of Oulu is responsible at national level for the teaching of the Sámi language and culture and teacher education in Sámi. Class teachers teaching in North Sámi are, as a rule, trained teachers. However, the education takes at least four years, and so far the scarce number of students has not increased the availability of teachers for basic teaching of Inari and Skolt Sámi.

There are also some special measures to support the substantive university studies of the Sámi. For example, the Northern Universities of Oulu and Lapland take into account the applicant's knowledge of Sámi languages on the scores in the entrance exam.

Production of teaching material

This year the Government grants 290 000 euros to the Sámi Parliament for the production of teaching material. The funds are reserved annually in the budget of the National Board of

Education. The Board allocates them to the Sámi Parliament, which is responsible for producing Sámi teaching material.

The funds may be used only for producing basic teaching material in Sámi and supplementary material for use at all levels of education pursuant to the national core curricula. The produced Sámi-language textbooks are free of charge for schools and providers of education. On the practical level the designed funds only provide opportunities to produce 1-2 teaching material per language for the Sámi people per year. This is therefore putting a lot of pressure for the teachers to provide teaching material in their own free time by themselves in order to fulfil the need of Sámi education.

The national core curricula and the needs to develop them are taken into account in the production of teaching material. Material has been produced in North, Inari and Skolt Sámi for all educational levels, from pre-school education to adult education. The Sámi Parliament is engaged in Nordic cooperation, contributes to developing Nordic Sámi terminology and cooperates with the Sámi Radio of the Finnish Broadcasting Company in the field of audio books and devices.

Remaining challenges

In recent years Finland has made some progress towards the realization of the Sámi people's right to education. However, despite some progress made, many challenges still remain.

As regards the Sámi education in Finland, one of the main challenges is that the education policies and curricula have not been following on the national level or practical level the rights of the indigenous peoples to education, specifically regarding to the UNDRIP's Article 14 which is neither incorporated into the national legislation nor implemented into practice.

Although the Basic Education *Act* and the Children's Day Care Act, among other legislation, lay down rights related to Sámi culture and the three Sámi languages spoken in Finland, even municipal authorities in the Sámi Homeland may still be unaware of statutory rights and obligations.

The Sámi Parliament has tried to increase the number of students applying for Sámi-language teacher education but the authorities have not found suitable means to support potential applicants.

Although the teaching in and of Sámi is very deficient also in the Sámi Homeland the situation is particularly alarming outside this region. Since very few Sámi children and young people are taught Sámi.

The national core curriculum requires that the schools in the Sámi Homeland must teach Sámi history. However, even some history textbooks written in Sámi present the in a stereotypical way and they lack true based information. No actual textbook on Sámi history is available in Finland. The lack of correct information on the Sámi people among the Finnish major population is a challenge. Even the Finnish authorities do not know enough about their own country's only indigenous people.

In the near past the international human rights monitoring bodies have given many recommendations to Finland on how to secure Sámi people's right as an indigenous people to education. For example the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur Mr. James Anaya on his visit to the Nordic countries, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) are really important and need to be followed up.

Also the initiatives, measures and statements by the Finnish Sámi Parliament regarding the Sámi people's education need to be followed up and respected. In this regard, it is of utmost importance to have proper consultation and negotiation processes between the Sámi Parliament and authorities.

Lastly, I would like to refer to the survey conducted by the Ombudsmen for Children in Finland, Sweden and Norway in 2007 and 2008. According to the survey Sámi children and young people were in unequal positions regarding the teaching of and in Sámi. The basic problem identified in

Sámi-language teaching was the lack of continuity, for the shortage of qualified Sámi-speaking subject teachers continued. Other problems included the lack of teaching material, and in Finland the fact that matriculation examination tests of subjects studied at school in Sámi, e.g. biology, could not be taken in Sámi. In the Finnish matriculation examination, only the tests of mother tongue and a foreign language can be taken in Sámi.

Another significant problem encountered in Finland was that children and young people were not taught Sámi culture and history. Moreover, Sámi children and young people considered that the portrayal of Sámi in the media was mainly in conflict with their own conception of contemporary Sámi. Media continues to give a very stereotyped picture of the Sámi. Children and young people wished that the radio, television and Internet would offer more services in Sámi. Especially in Finland and Sweden, particularly the children of the majority population living outside the Sámi Homeland knew very little or hardly anything at all about the Sámi or their culture, and Sámi culture was not included in their studies.