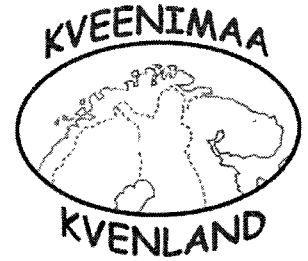


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EM16 Seppola



Dear members of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Dear participants of this conference

Dear friends

My name is Bjørnar Seppola. I represent The Kveeni People. I will speak about some Goals necessary for a Sustainable future, but first some small information of the Kven people

Kven People are a Fenno-Ugric group in Northern Scandinavia. Kvenland Association is founded in 1999 to promote cooperation between Kvens in the northern part of Sweden, Norway and Finland. I am a citizen of Norway. My friends with me here are citizens of Sweden and Finland.

Traditional ways of life for Kvens are: hunting, fishing, trapping, herding, agriculture and forestry. They are linked closely to nature. Today many Kvens have moved to urban areas and those who remain in the traditional areas are becoming fewer all the time. Our rights for our old professions and use of land and water are threatened by depopulation and other interests in modern society. Kvens have populated Northern part of Scandinavia at least 1000 years. Kven was recognized as a separate ethnic group and admitted membership of the Fenno-Ugric World Congress in 2004. Kven People are an indigenous People in the Northern Scandinavia.

The spoken language of Kvens are divided into several dialects. The language has the closest relation to Finnish, Karelian, Ingrian and Vepsian language. The number of speakers has declined during the long term of banning in Norwegian and Swedish schools. The number of speakers in Norway is left about 1000. In Sweden about 5000. And in Finland about 15 000. The writing of the language is divided in 3 directions: Meän kieli, Kainuun kieli and Kven-finnish. The last based on the Finnish grammar and writing system.

To be able to develop a sustainable future a People must have the right for self-determination. For Kvens it's important to have the right to define ourselves and the right to write our own history. People's history is closely associated with its identity. A widely used method in the oppression of minorities and indigenous peoples is to suppress their history. Kvens are exposed to this kind of oppression.

Kvens have their own history that we know ourselves. But others, those who want oppress Kvens, stock another story about Kvens. Kvens and Finns have a long history in the northern part of Scandinavia. Already the Norwegian sailor Ottar reported about Kvens in the 800's. Kven people was 1000 years ago a nation with its own land, Kvenland, and its own kings. King Faravid from 800s are the most famous of them. The old Kvenland was already in the Middle Ages divided between Norway, Sweden and Finland. The Rights to land and water were conferred on the State in these three countries. Despite the fact that it is easy to find sources of Kven history for more than 1,000 years, creates and conveys one in Norway a story that Kvens are immigrants from the southern part of Scandinavia who came north for only 3-400 years ago. From our point of view it would be important if the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples could, in its further work, emphasize the importance of that minorities and indigenous peoples themselves have the opportunity to conduct research and even describe its history themselves. This is not possible for us in Norway today.

Another point we want to dwell a bit with is the right to educate our children, not only in their own language but also in their own culture and in their own history. Today, we are obliged to send our children to Scandinavian schools. They are obliged to learn the Norwegian and Swedish version of Kven history in

Swedish and Norwegian language. The Norwegian school system is a form of brainwashing of minority children. Norwegian Government recognizes Kvens as a linguistic minority and can accept restrict use of Kven and Finnish three hours per week, but the Norwegian government did not accept rights to own schools nor the right to own nurseries. The Swedish government and the Finnish government are not willing to give any support to the Kven culture at all. We ask all who have possibility, in meetings with representatives of the Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish governments encourage them to make the necessary funds available so the Kvens can develop their culture, including their own kindergartens, schools and research institutions.

The third point is to still have the right to use land and wather. Kveen People's Day is 16 of Marsh. It is for remembering the agreement between the Norwegian and Swedish King Magnus Erikson did with the leaders of kvens (Birkarler) signed 16 March 1340. A copy of this agreement is still preserved in the Swedish archives. After this agreement should Kvens have their own rights forever if they agreed to become Swedish and Norwegian citizens. But only after 300 years later the Nordic governments broke the agreement and took over the right to rivers, lakes, forests and mountains in the old Kvenland and made this right to be state property. Kvens use of land and water have anyway continued up til now. But today, the pressure on resources are greater than before. Kvens right to use land and water must be ensured through agreements in a different way than before. The governments of Norway, Sweden and Finland have up to now not been willing to enter into a dialogue on how Kvens rights to land and water will be ensured in future. We need help and support from experts of indigenous peoples about Right to land and water. And more important, we have need for advocatory and advice about how to proceed in order to get the governments of Norway, Sweden and Finland working together to ensure Kvens right to use of land and water in the future.

We would finally like to thank the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples who kindly have given us permission to come here to this 9th Session. We would like to thank all of you sitting in this chamber for having given you time to listen to what we have to say. It has been a great pleasure for us to meet so many interesting people who are concerned with the same issues as us. We express the wish that we will meet you again in the future and look forward to seeing you again in New York in May 2017.

Thank you for your attention.

Bjørnar Seppola  
Kvenland Assosiation