

12/07/11

EMfinlande060



MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN  
AFFAIRS OF FINLAND

Check against delivery

**Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples  
Fourth Session, 11-15 July 2011  
Item 4**

**Statement by Finland  
12 July 2011**

Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished members of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,  
Delegates and participants of the fourth session,

[I would like to align myself with the statement made earlier by Poland on behalf of the European Union.]

Let me begin by expressing the appreciation of my Government to the important work that this Expert Mechanism continuously delivers. We continue to support the Expert Mechanism's mandate to provide the Human Rights Council with thematic advice, in the form of studies and research, on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Despite their rich cultures and identities, indigenous peoples are often amongst the most marginalized groups in society, deprived of participation in decision-making processes that affect their lives and future. The participation of indigenous peoples in decision-making is of crucial importance to the enjoyment of their human rights, their survival and dignity. We therefore welcome the completion of the Expert Mechanism's new thematic study which aims at enhancing the meaningful and effective participation of indigenous peoples in decision-making. In particular, we thank the Expert Mechanism for conducting a transparent study process and presenting us with good practices and concrete advice. We would welcome the mechanism's views on appropriate follow-up to this study.

As for Finland, the Act on the Sámi Parliament guarantees the cultural autonomy of the Sámi as an indigenous people in respect to their language and culture in Finland. It contains an obligation to negotiate with the Sámi Parliament on all levels of administration in all far-reaching and significant measures, in situations which may directly affect the status of the Sámi as an indigenous people in their homeland.

Other laws have recently been amended to improve the status of the Sámi as an indigenous people and their opportunities to participate in decision-making. These include the revised mining and water acts. Both include provisions aimed at improving the possibilities for the Sámi to participate in decision-making. In addition, the Sámi Parliament has been given the right of appeal in cases where the rights of the Sámi would not be adequately taken into account in decisions pursuant to these Acts.

The three Nordic neighbours, Finland, Norway and Sweden, launched negotiations on a Nordic Sami Convention in March 2011. Delegations consist of representatives of both Government agencies and the Sámi Parliaments. Half of the members in the Finnish delegation are Sámi. The negotiations are expected to be concluded within five years. The Convention is expected to strengthen the rights of the Sámi in preserving and developing their language, culture, livelihoods and social life throughout the Nordic Sámi area. The promotion of spaces for dialogue is a key principle of the draft.

It is important that whenever the rights of indigenous peoples are being addressed by the Human Rights Council, indigenous peoples and their organizations are able to participate in the process. The Council will thus be able to take informed decisions which take into account the real situation of indigenous peoples.

The Finnish Government is pleased to see that the Expert Mechanism's proposal to further expand the mandate of the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations has been accepted. This will facilitate the participation of representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations in sessions of the Council and treaty bodies. We encourage Governments and other stakeholders to contribute to the Fund.

Lastly, I would like to inform the Expert Mechanism that the Permanent Missions of Finland and Ecuador, the Finnish Sámi Parliament and the Ministry of Coordination of Heritage of Ecuador jointly organized a side-event at the Permanent Forum meeting in New York last May, focussing on indigenous peoples' institutions and the right to participate in decision-making. The discussion at the event brought out many valuable ideas to further address the issue of participation.

I thank you.