

STATEMENT BY SUOMA SÁMI NUORAT
ITEM 4

Thank you Madame Chair,

I am Susanna Enni Similä and I speak on behalf of the Finnish Saami Youth Organization.

It is a known fact that declining mental health and risk for suicide have higher levels in indigenous communities. The Saami are no exception. However, the Saami youth face a significant challenge in attempting to support and help ourselves.

In Finland there are no existing mechanisms to collect data on how many of us struggle with depression and other mental health problems. The Saami council has conducted a suicide prevention plan for the Saami, but it's not used by Finland.

There exists very little data on how many Saami take their own lives each year. However, the few statistics from Saami municipalities clearly show the rate to be significantly higher than the national average. There are no specific health institutions that address the Saami community or hold resources with cultural competence in Finland. There are examples of the efforts in suicide prevention that work better, such as in Norway, where a national competence centre for mental illness and drug abuse exists.

The fear and uncertainty that Saami face regarding their future, as well as the feeling of not being able to participate in decision making, makes the Saami hopeless. Young Saami see their livelihoods criminalized, such as in the case of the river Deatnu, or severely threatened, like the arctic railway. Overgenerational trauma has never been given a chance to heal, and it's still affecting our wellbeing. This is reflected particularly visibly in Saami men.

In addition, practically no support exists for the Saami to develop de-colonized tools to combat mental health problems. The effects of just one suicide in a small community are enormous, so the loss of every Saami hurts deeply and is felt widely.

It's not enough that Saami youths can receive help from people, who have no education and no knowledge of the Saami or indigenous peoples as a whole. We need increased and continued support to develop our own ways of helping each other, and we need the state to recognize its role in limiting access to traditional lands and livelihoods, affecting negatively in Saami wellbeing.

The Saami youth in Finland recommend that the Permanent Forum provide support for Finland to create establish institutions to work with mental illness and drug abuse with indigenous competence. Finland should also create mechanisms to collect reliable data on indigenous youth mental health problems and suicide rates. We also recommend that the

Permanent Forum provide support for a comprehensive suicide prevention plan to cover all indigenous peoples worldwide . We have carried our burdens with us for long enough. It's time the states carried theirs.

Olu giitu, thank you very much.