

Statement Item 8

Aili Keskitalo, President of the Sami Parliament

Buorre beaivi,

I speak on behalf of the Sami Parliaments and the Saami Council.

The joint conference of Sami parliaments in Trånte in 2017 set the outlines for the preparations of the truth and reconciliation processes in the Nordic countries, from a Sami perspective. We see truth and reconciliation processes as an important step towards improving the position of the Sámi in the society and re-building trust between the Sámi and the State.

I refer to the paragraph 53 in EMRIPs draft report that describes the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Norway, to investigate the assimilation policies against the Sami people and the Kven minority in Norway. We are quite hopeful that it will contribute to a new relationship between the Sami people and the majority society in Norway.

I now acknowledge the support we received from the international Indigenous community during this process. We are especially grateful to Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild for inspiration and advice.

This session has earlier deliberated on Indigenous Peoples rights in the context of borders, migration and displacement. The borders of four states divide our Sami homelands, and we have experienced displacement and forced migration across the state borders. A TRC process in one of the states we live in, and not yet in the other states, underlines the separation that the state borders force upon us.

Currently the negotiations regarding the mandate of the truth and reconciliation commission are still ongoing in Finland. The Sámi Parliament of Sweden handed over a formal request to the Government on the establishment and funding of a Sámi truth commission on Sweden's severe rights violations and forced assimilation of the Sámi people.

We expect that Sweden and Finland follow the Norwegian example and establish truth and reconciliation commissions, with full consensus with the Sámi Parliaments on the mandate. We would welcome a recommendation to address the challenge of TRC processes involving Indigenous Peoples with borders crossing their territories. They should happen coordinated and connected.

(That would better ensure the processes taking place in an Indigenous perspective, in line with views and principles presented in the paragraphs 45, 46 and 47 in the draft report of the Expert Mechanism. We hope to be able to report progress on this matter in the following EMRIP session.)

This year is the IYIL, and before I conclude, I would like to remind us all of the connection between languages and reconciliation, peacebuilding and sustainable development. Recognition and implementation of the rights to Indigenous languages is a core element in reconciliation. We will not have true reconciliation before Indigenous Peoples are truly free to speak think and live in our own languages, and one year is not enough to secure that. I thank the Expert Mechanism for joining the call for a Decade of Indigenous Languages.

Giitu!