

Statements by the Finnish government at the ~~technical session of the~~ Geneva UN Commission on Human Rights, ~~dealing with the Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples, July 19th to 21st 1995,~~ and the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, July 24th to 28th 1995.

## 5. Review of developments Finland

### ~~Legislation concerning the Sami~~

On June 16th 1995, the Finnish parliament approved the Sami Cultural Autonomy Statute as part of the Finnish Constitution, and other legislation.

The amendment to the Constitution reads as follows:

"As an indigenous people, the Sami are guaranteed the right of cultural autonomy in the Sami homeland, with regard to their own language and culture, as decreed by law."

In addition, a law was passed concerning the Sami <sup>Parliament</sup> Court. This results in the following practical changes being made:

- The definition of who is a Sami will be enlarged, thus the number of people considered Sami will increase
- The Sami Court will submit an annual report to the government
- A full-time Chairperson of the Sami Court will be appointed
- Government officials are obliged to consult with the Sami Court on any significant matters in the Sami homeland concerning planning and implementation of land usage, regulations concerning Sami occupations, and education, health, and social welfare policy
- Responsibility for Sami policy co-ordination ~~will be~~ <sup>was</sup> transferred from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Justice.

During hearings of the Sami Cultural Autonomy Statute, fierce opposition was mounted by non-Sami living in the Sami homeland. Criticism was levelled at the hasty preparation of

the statute, the definition of Sami status, the confidentiality of electoral registers, and the imprecise nature of the terms "autonomy" and "culture". The Sami Cultural Autonomy Statute was especially feared as an encroachment on the occupational rights of non-Sami residents in the Sami homeland.

In approving the Sami Cultural Autonomy Statute, parliament also approved the following statement: "Parliament notes that any new legislation shall not signify changes in who may practice reindeer breeding, hunting, fishing, or other occupations in the Sami homeland."

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