

Notáhhta • Notat

Geasa/Til:
Min čuj./Vár ref: 18/2943 - 12
Beaivi/Dato: 25.06.2021

14th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – virtual session, 12 - 16 July 2021

Tuesday 13 July 15h00 – 18h00

Item 3: Draft Study and Advice on the Rights of the Indigenous Child under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The President of the Sámi Parliament in Norway, Aili Keskitalo

Thank you Chair,

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Sámi Parliament in Norway.

Thank you for this opportunity to address a very important topic. Children's right to protection and well-being is well known. At the same time, we are cognisant of the fact that indigenous children need special protection. I am terribly saddened and shaken by the abject abuse uncovered in Canada in the recent time. Although we do not yet have a full overview of what has happened to indigenous children in these residential schools, this news is a painful reminder to us, as adult politicians, that we must be constantly vigilant to keep children safe.

Sámi children who live in Norway have the right to free education on an equal footing with the rest of the population. However, some Sámi children are being denied their right to instruction in and through the medium of Sámi. A lack of Sámi-speaking teachers, bureaucratic challenges and, in some cases, a lack of knowledge on the part of the school, make it difficult to satisfy the right to instruction in and through Sámi. In Norway, the Sámediggi is following the Norwegian Government's efforts to draft a new Education Act closely. The Act must ensure that Sámi children get the opportunity to use their language and practice their culture at school.

We are also consulting with the Government on the drafting of a new Children's Act. In this context, it is crucial for us to point out that Sámi children's rights to their languages and culture are independent rights that follow the children, even if their care situation changes. In Norway, there is a great deal of focus on the idea that a child's best interest must consistently be taken into account in all assessments. The Sámediggi agrees with this, but points out that safeguarding languages and culture is an integral part of such 'best interest' assessments. Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child imposes on us a clear obligation to protect this aspect of children's childhoods.

Regrettably, Sámi children are also vulnerable to violence and abuse. The Sámediggi has drawn attention to this in connection with the Norwegian Government's new Action Plan against Violence in Close Relationships. For the first time ever, the Action Plan will include a separate section covering special initiatives to combat violence in the Sámi community. We expect the Government, in collaboration with the Sámi community, to be especially concerned with protecting Sámi children against violence. We also implore the Government to ensure that when injustices and abuse are committed against Sámi children, there must be consequences if the authorities fail to intervene despite being aware of the situation. Under such circumstances, society as a whole must acknowledge its responsibility and be willing to offer compensation to those who have had their childhoods destroyed.

By way of conclusion, I would add that the protection of indigenous children's rights and well-being rests squarely on the shoulders of each and every one of us. It is incumbent upon us to strive to raise awareness of children's rights and child welfare. Children need our attention and energy, and they deserve to have it by virtue of their very existence.

Thank you for your attention.