

PFII 18th session

Item 11: Dialogue with the SRIP and EMRIP chair

Intervention of the Saami Council, read by Aslak Holmberg

24 April 2019

Transfer of reindeer pastures to a hunt club by the Russian government without the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples

Madam chair,

This intervention is based on a written submission delivered to the attention of the Forum by the Foundation for Saami Heritage and Development and the indigenous-led economic initiative – the farm “Reindeer Herder”. The farm has operated since 1920’s in Lovozersky municipal district in Murmansk region in North-West Russia. It is a collective farm that employs 61 individuals belonging to indigenous peoples of Saami and Izhma-komi.

On 26th November 2018, the Ministry for Natural Resources and Ecology of Murmansk region opened an auction for the hunting area of 72 thousand hectares in Lovozersky district covering, *inter alia*, reindeer pastures and wintering grounds of the reindeer farm. The hunt club “BEZRK” from Belgorod region won the rent contract for the term of 30 years with the annual rental rate of approximately 50 dollars.

Indigenous peoples never hunt on these lands to avoid disturbing the reindeer migration routes and to protect female reindeer foraging there before giving birth to their calves. The auction was held without notifying the local indigenous community and the reindeer farm who is using these areas. The regional administration excluded the reindeer farm from the decision-making process and ignored indigenous peoples’ priority rights to wildlife and traditional economic activity, as stipulated by Federal Law.

Since 2005, the farm has been trying to obtain a long-term rent contract with the regional government for their grazing and breeding grounds. The Murmansk regional administration has consistently refused to lease the area to the farm. The authorities have ignored the farm’s suggestion not to approve the scheme of hunting areas that include reindeer pastures, and to prohibit wild reindeer hunting in Lovozersky municipal district of Murmansk region.

We call for the Permanent Forum, EMRIP and the SRIP to investigate this issue and invite you to visit the region and to assist in starting the dialogue with the Russian government. We call on the Russian Federation to ensure the protection of our human rights.

We thank you for your attention on this pressing issue.