



**PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY
TO THE OSCE**

STATEMENT ON THE SÁMI NATIONAL DAY

As delivered by Ambassador Anne-Kirsti Karlsen at the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 8 February 2024

Thank you, Madame Chair,

Two days ago, on 6 February, we celebrated the Sámi National Day. The Sámi people is an indigenous people mainly inhabiting the Arctic area called Sápmi, which today encompasses parts of northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula of Russia.

6 February marks the first Sámi national congress, held in Norway in 1917 with representatives from all four countries. The meeting came partly because of increasing Sámi opposition against the policy of assimilation introduced by the Norwegian government towards the end of the 19th century.

Last year, a commission investigating the policy of Norwegianization and the injustices against the Sámi people, Forest Finns and Kvens/Norwegian Finns – The Truth and Reconciliation Commission – submitted its report to the Norwegian Parliament.

The Commission has revealed how the history of assimilation and its consequences up to this day are largely unknown to most Norwegians. To enter a reconciliation process means being willing to take responsibility, and to be serious about addressing the injustices that have been made. Not everything can be put right, but we can learn from history and the mistakes made.

The Norwegian Sámi Act of 1987 codified rights for the Sámi People, including the establishment of the Sámi parliament. In 1988, the Sámi people was granted a constitutional right to develop its language, culture, and society. And according to the ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal peoples, which Norway has ratified, all levels of government must consult with the Sámi in all matters of concern to them.

Madame Chair,

Despite legal and administrative improvements, there are still challenging issues between Norwegian authorities, private enterprises, and Sami interests, not least related to economic and environmental developments in regions considered crucial for reindeer husbandry.

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A current issue is the need for more renewable energy, a more robust grid, and an increased supply of critical raw materials. However, challenges arise when the land needed is already occupied by traditional indigenous industries such as reindeer herding, coastal fishing and agriculture.

In October 2021, the Supreme Court of Norway ruled that the licenses for wind farms of the Fosen peninsula from 2013 constituted a violation of the rights of the Sami reindeer herders to enjoy their own culture. The procedures of consultation, and the mitigating measures implemented, had not been good enough.

Last March, the Prime Minister extended an apology to the affected Sámi reindeer herders.

In December last year the mediation between reindeer herders in the Southern part of the area and the wind power company resulted in an amicable settlement. We hope that an agreement soon also can be reached for the Northern part of the affected area. More such issues may arise in the future. However, we intend to solve them through democratic processes and within the principles of the rule of law.

Dear Colleagues,

The nationwide celebration of the Sámi National Day helps raise the visibility of Sámi culture and languages across Norway and contributes to increased awareness among the public. In doing so, it aids our efforts to strengthen our indigenous culture and languages. Today it is also true to say that the celebration of the Sámi National Day embraces tolerance and advocates against discrimination.

So, by way of concluding, let us recall that the OSCE has a toolbox which can assist us as participating States in promoting tolerance and non-discrimination. For instance, the High Commissioner for National Minorities, Kairat Abdrakhmanov, visited Sami institutions in Northern Norway as well as Norwegian government institutions in November, both to learn from our experiences and to give advice. We hope this visit can contribute to HCNM's work on how climate change disproportionately affects minorities.

We encourage all states to make use of such tools, and fight prejudices wherever they appear.

I thank you.