

# Statement about the work for a truth commission on historical events and abuse of the Sami people in Sweden.

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**In Sweden, there is a lack of knowledge about the Sami people and their history**, which is the case in other Nordic countries as well. Over the past centuries, the Swedish State has discriminated the Sami in many ways; through unjust legislation, through an ethnic “Swedifying” policy that had an especially negative impact on school children, through regulations and attitudes reflected in for example skull measurements, tipi-like boarding schools and forbidding reindeer-herding Sami to live in houses. In one way or another, we all bear our common trauma that has also resulted in a deep chasm that splits the Sami people today. International organs such as the UN and the Council of Europe stress Sweden’s recurrent disrespect of Sami rights as an indigenous people and how this discrimination affects the Sami’s situation. There are written reports and a certain amount of research, but we are still missing a more in-depth, overall compilation of the abuses as well as an admission from the Swedish State. Sweden’s dark history must be brought into the light for real change to be possible.

**Over the years, suggestions have been presented** and wishes from the Sami for a truth commission. A truth commission can both investigate and suggest what measures can be taken. The commission must have an independent mandate and the work must result in consequences for Sweden’s Sami policy. Therefore, we realized early on that we want an independent truth commission and not a *white paper*.

**The work in a future truth commission** must have limits. It is impossible to start pulling on every thread at once. We must ourselves decide which demands we want to set. Therefore the preparatory work is extremely important. When we agree on what we want, we will present it to the Swedish government. The decision on an independent truth commission must be made by the government and Parliament and be financed by the State.

**After a decision in the Swedish Sami Parliament plenary assembly** in May 2014, the parliament started their work together with the Equality ombudsman (DO) and Vaartoe – The Centre for Sami Research at the University of Umeå, Sweden. I wasn't the president at the time, but it was agreed that it was a good idea to learn from those with experience in working with truth commissions in other countries and invite them to a seminar to share knowledge and discuss the subject. The Equality ombudsman was helpful in finding and inviting these experts.

**In September 2016, representatives** for national Sami organizations and Sami parliament parties met with the Sami Parliament, Equality ombudsman and Vaartoe to prepare a planned round table discussion. At the end of October 2016, there was a two-day discussion as well as an open seminar which was open to the public. Six international experts with different areas of expertise and experiences participated. The themes discussed were:

- Establishment and mandate for truth commissions
- work methods and
- objectives and results

The unedited presentations from the open seminar on truth commissions have been loaded up on the Swedish Sami Parliament's YouTube channel for those interested. The participating experts were:

- **Dr Julia Raue** – Adviser to the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence (Mr. Pablo de Greiff)
- **Mr Eduardo Gonzalez** – Expert in transitional justice. Has contributed to technology and strategic advice to truth-seeking initiatives in about 20 countries and has had a leading position in connection with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Peru.
- **Mag. Dr. Gerhard Baumgartner** – Historian and Director of the Documentation Centre for Austrian Resistance, previously a project director for the Austrian Historical Commission.
- **Chief Wilton Littlechild** – Lawyer and one of three commissioners in the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- **Dr. Paulette Regan** – Historian and Senior Advisor at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University in Manitoba, Canada, previously senior researcher and writer for the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

- **Laila Susanne Vars**, director of the Gáldu Resource Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, previously member and vice president to the Norwegian Sami Parliament.

**A few months after the seminar**, the representatives for Sami organizations and parties met again. They agreed to appoint a work group to come with a suggestion on how the work with a Sami truth commission would be able to continue. The members of the group were Marie Persson Njajta, Kristina Krihke Nordling, Isak Utsi and Simon Wetterlund.

**In March 2018, the larger group** met again, with a few new participants, part of the parliament's new board, since we had parliament elections during that period. Every Sami Parliament party was represented. The meeting was supported by the work group results with their global report and a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that may be met along the way towards a truth commission. We discussed in smaller groups and commented on the SWOT analysis that has not yet been made public. The work group is commissioned to edit and prepare the finished analysis. The analysis stems from a position where we can consider beginning a process of establishment and at an early stage get a picture of the obstacles and opportunities we can all see to continue with the process.

**Possible ways to continue** could be to initiate hearings to obtain observations and comments to mandates (like Norway and Finland) and to cooperate over borders, deepen established contacts and perhaps participate in hearing on the Norwegian and Finnish sides. Other things may need to be further investigated, for example comparing what resources other countries have contributed, legal prerequisites for a truth commission in Sweden and models for establishment. The work group has also suggested creating a portal for sharing information to ensure transparency in the work.

This is as far as we have come in our preparatory work on the Swedish side of Sápmi.

**It is an exciting process**, but also something serious. We do not want to fail, and we must have the people with us. So far there are few outside the parliament that really know what we are doing, and I think there are quite a few questions and doubts. And probably fears. For what is going to happen when the Sami begin telling their stories? We must also be prepared

to handle the pain and anger that will surely come. There must be a preparedness and a plan on how to take care of people even in the future so that we can reach the ultimate objective with a truth commission: reconciliation and amends (justice).