

# PREPARATIONS BEFORE A TRUTH COMMISSION ON THE VIOLATIONS OF THE SAMI PEOPLE BY THE SWEDISH STATE



**Title:** Preparations before a truth commission on the violations of the Sami people by the Swedish State

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**Cover image:** Oil painting by Johan Tirén 1892, a contribution to the debate on the conflicts between the Sami and the ironmaster Farup at Ljusnedals forge in Härjedalen. Farup was the town's parliamentary representative for many years.  
Photo: Bertil Wretling/Nordiska Museet.

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## Summary

Throughout history, The Sami people have been subjected to abuse, violations, and racism. These wrongdoings still have a negative effect on the living conditions of the Sami people and individuals. They also effect the relations between different Sami groups and between the Sami people and the Swedish State. The Sami Parliament Plenary Assembly adopted a motion in 2014 to work with the matter of setting up a Truth Commission to examine the abuses of the Sami by the State. Vital parts in this work are the round-table discussions and seminars with international experts that were arranged in Umeå in 2016 as well as the SWOT-analysis that a working group developed in 2018. These are the foundation for the proposal that the Sami Parliament unanimously submitted to the Ministry of Culture in June 2019. In 2020, The Parliament was given a government assignment to prepare and anchor the work for a Truth Commission in the Sami community. This report is an account of what has been accomplished within the assignment and presents the viewpoints that have emerged in discussions and questionnaires.

A truth commission should examine how the actions of the Swedish State and the County Administrative Boards divided the Sami people, primarily through the so-called "a Lapp should be a Lapp"-policy, which had elements of both cultural darwinism and racism. This was expressed in the nomad school reform of 1913 and the reindeer husbandry legislation of 1928. The Sami lost ownership rights to land and water; the right to reindeer husbandry was limited, different types of reindeer husbandry were set against each other, and Sami in other traditional livelihoods such as hunting, fishing and handicrafts were excluded from the rights system. The issue of land is a theme mentioned by many. A truth commission should review what happened when the Sami lost their lands; the so called *lapps katteland* (Sami tax-lands), land distribution, resource exploitation and encroachments.

The double policy of the State was partly segregation policy, partly assimilation policy, depending on group affiliation and where you lived. The nomad school was an attack on the family, the social coherency and culture when children were removed from their environment to live at boarding schools. Those Sami children that did not attend nomad schools experienced language oppression and cultural alienation in the ordinary public school. The "Swedification" process, the consequences of lost language and the difficulties in reclaiming one's language as an adult is an urgent theme. The possibility for learning the Sami language is still limited in secondary and upper secondary school. Cross-border related problems include reindeer grazing conventions and forced migrations, primarily of North Sami reindeer herding families to areas further south and the consequences thereof, but also other types of forced migrations throughout history.

A majority of the Sami that have answered the questionnaire or participated in meetings express high or very high expectations on a truth commission. Several voices expect the truth commission to investigate injustice and wrong-doing and lead to change in many ways. It is of utmost importance that a future, independent truth commission is given a wide mandate, large room to maneuver and adequate time and resources. In closing, the Swedish Sami Parliament stresses the importance of health professionals being engaged in psycho-social support functions in connection with the truth commission work. This must be done together with the northern regions and the network knowledgeable in Sami health.

## Preface

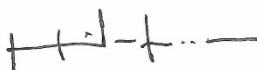
The foundation of this report is based primarily on the views of Sami, compiled from dialogue and video meetings, replies to questionnaires, telephone conversations and e-mails to the Sami Parliament. The material is very emotional, covering a wide range of emotions. They encompass wishes and dreams, anger, disappointment, defeatism, hopelessness, sorrow, bitterness, longing, hope and very many deep wounds. It is impossible to be immersed in people's stories and not be moved. We have the utmost respect for everyone's opinions and views we have received and everything they represent. Because of the limited project time and difficulty in holding physical meetings, vital perspectives and experiences may be missing from this report. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that a future, independent truth commission is given a wide mandate, plenty of maneuvering room and enough time and resources. All material will be submitted to a future truth commission. Thank you to everyone that has contributed to that this foundation work was able to be carried out despite the present Covid-19 pandemic.

The political decisions and abuses have affected people's lives and the lives of their offspring for a long time to come. It is an enormous responsibility to exercise power over other people's living conditions. The decisions that politicians made over a century ago have affected and continue to affect the Sami community today. The responsibility for these decisions transverse the boundaries of political parties. As an example, the Swedish Institute for Racial Biology in Uppsala in 1922 after both houses of parliament adopted a motion where all political directions in the Riksdag were represented among the members, among others both Hjalmar Branting and Arvid Lindman. Just like them, today's politicians and authorities represent the Swedish State. It is now high time to establish a fair and independent truth commission to investigate the abuses of the Swedish State carried out and are still carrying out against the Sami and heed the demands of vindication by the Sami.

The Swedish Sami Parliament steering group for the foundation process



Matti Blind Berg



Håkan Jonsson



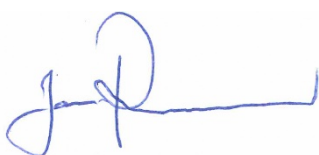
Anders Kråik



Marita Stinnerbom



Joakim Pääve



Jan Rannerud



Marie Persson Njajta

# 1. Background

The UN General Assembly decided in December 1993 to proclaim an international indigenous peoples decennium 1994 – 2004. In April 1995, the Swedish government appointed a delegation called the Indigenous Peoples Delegation that worked between 1995 – 2004.<sup>1</sup> Among many other things, the delegation even conducted a study on reconciliation policy called *Ursäkt och försoning – nytt partnerskap mellan Sverige och samerna* (2001) (Apology and reconciliation – new partnership between Sweden and the Sami). The delegation wanted to highlight the reconciliation processes that had been initiated in several western countries and point out the importance of a coherent, conscious and strategic Sami policy. The study can be seen as the first initiative to establish a Sami truth commission in Sweden.

The Sami youth organization *Saminuorra* wrote a letter in 2008 to the then minister of agriculture and Sami issues Eskil Erlandsson to demand that the government establish a truth commission to investigate all forms of abuse committed by Sweden to the Sami. In February 2012 four Sami Parliament members<sup>2</sup> submitted a motion<sup>3</sup> to the Sami Parliament where they pleaded for the parliament to work on the government assigning an independent truth commission to investigate the abuses that the Sami have been subjected to in Sweden. Their motivation was among others the great lack of knowledge and cultural understanding of the Sami, both in school, among authorities and the general public in Sweden. The members cited that an independent truth commission would be able to present an objective historical description of the abuses committed and give Sweden the opportunity to reconcile with its history. The motion was adopted by a united plenary session gathered in Åre on 22 – 26 May 2014.

On 16 June 2015 the then Sami Parliament Chairman of the Board Håkan Jonssen initiated a cooperation with the Discrimination Ombudsman (DO). DO and the Sami Parliament concluded in a joint statement<sup>4</sup> that the Sami community to a large extent has been marked by the colonization the Sami were subjected to and the State sanctioned discrimination that followed in the tracks of colonization. They reminded that international organizations such as the UN and Council of Europe have pointed out shortcomings in how Sweden respects the rights of the Sami as an indigenous people.

The cooperation meant, on the one hand, that a reference group was formed consisting of representatives of the Sami organizations and Sami Parliament parties, and on the other that a round table discussion and an open seminar with international experts with experience from truth commissions were arranged to gather experiences and knowledge from other processes and truth commissions.

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<sup>1</sup> The delegation was made up of Peter Weiderud (chairman), Ylva Gustafsson, Ulf Johansson Dahre, Jörgen Jonsson, Harriet Nordlund, Sigrid Stångberg and Göran Ternbo (secretary)

<sup>2</sup> Kristina Nordling, Lars-Paul Kråik, Carola Fjällström and Helena Dådbring

<sup>3</sup> M217, dnr 2012-415

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sametinget.se/90491>

The round table discussions and seminar were held in Umeå on 25 – 26 October 2016 and arranged by the Sami Parliament, DO and Vaartoe, the Centre for Sami Research at Umeå University.<sup>5</sup> The themes that were addressed were:

- 1) Establishment and mandate of truth commissions
- 2) Approach
- 3) Goals and results

The international experts who participated in the seminar were:

- Dr. Julia Raue - adviser to the UN Special Rapporteur on Truth, Justice, Compensation and Guarantees of Non-Repetition (Pablo De Greiff)
- Mr. Eduardo Gonzalez - expert in transitional justice, former Head of Public Hearings and Witness Protection of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru
- Mag. Dr. Gerhard Baumgartner – historian and director of the Austrian Resistance Documentation Centre, former researcher of the Commission of Austrian Historians
- Chief Wilton Littlechild – lawyer and one of three Commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada
- Dr. Paulette Regan – historian and senior adviser at the National Center for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba, former researcher and writer for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada
- Laila Susanne Vars, lawyer and director at Gáldu – Resource Centre for Indigenous Rights in Kautokeino, Norway, Commission member of the Tater/Romani Selection Board established by the Norwegian Government in 2011

The lectures are recorded and can be found on Sami Parliament's website.<sup>6</sup> DO also compiled a report with memos published in 2018.<sup>7</sup>

At the Sami Parliamentarian Conference in Tråante (Trondheim) on 7 February 2017, a joint statement was adopted by the Sami Parliament.<sup>8</sup> The statement states, among other things:

*We argue that acceptance, recognition and reconciliation* are not only about the relationship between Sami and non-Sami, but equally about acceptance and recognition that assimilation affected different Sami and different communities in different ways. There must be greater openness about the diversity and differences in the experiences, stories and descriptions of the reality of Sami and Sami communities in relation to assimilation and today's reality;

*We consider it important* to initiate reconciliation processes that facilitate and remedy the negative developments and consequences suffered by the Sami through the assimilation processes, both at collective and individual levels. We expect the process of truth and reconciliation to also lead to redress for the Sami;

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<sup>5</sup> Now with the Ume Sami spelling: Várdduo – Centre for Sami Research

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.sametinget.se/110388>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sametinget.se/125416>, see also Appendix 3.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.sametinget.se/115170>



*We call on the respective States*, in consultation with the respective Sami parliaments, to agree on the methods and conditions for initiating truth and reconciliation processes, to allow individuals to participate voluntarily in the process and to be offered psychological support in the meantime, and to allocate sufficient personnel, technical and financial resources to this work;

*We refer to* the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada and the Commission's report and results and how this work has been followed up at a national level and among indigenous peoples themselves, which can in many ways be developed as good examples and be models for a future Sami truth and reconciliation process in Sami and Nordic countries;

*We are committed to* informing about the development of truth and reconciliation processes, and to contributing to the establishment of such processes nationally and cross-border where necessary;

*We expect the* objective of the truth and reconciliation process to be to examine and document historical repression and abuses as well as crimes against human rights, to explain how this affects the Sami and our societies today, and to propose how the relationship between the Sami people, countries and Sami can be strengthened among ourselves;

*We also expect* the results of the truth and reconciliation processes to be for the States to take responsibility and, in consultation with the Sami parliaments, to strengthen the Sami position as a people in the Nordic countries;

*We stress that*, to achieve real equality and equivalence, internationally recognized and binding human and indigenous rights must be respected and implemented at local, national, regional, cross-border and international levels, in particular the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

May 2017, an election to the Sami parliament took place in Sweden and thereafter a new board took office. In 2018 a working group<sup>9</sup> presented a SWOT analysis<sup>10</sup> identifying the weaknesses, strengths, opportunities and threats that a process against the establishment of a truth commission may face.

As work on the Truth Commission continued, a joint petition was prepared by the Sami Council and a wide range of Sami political parties, together with participating Sami organizations, stood behind. On 12 June 2019, Chairman of the Board Per-Olof Nutti submitted the Sami Parliament's petition<sup>11</sup> to the Minister of Culture and Democracy Amanda Lind that the government will finance a process to establish, in cooperation with the Sami Parliament, an independent truth commission on the abuses of the Sami by the Swedish State.

The petition ends with the following expectations and prerequisites:

- That the preparation and implementation of a truth commission on the Swedish State's abuses against the Sami and the human rights of Sami should be financed by the State.

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<sup>9</sup> Work group consisted of Marie Persson Njajta, Kristina Krihke Nordling and Isak Utsi.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.sametinget.se/124176>, also Appendix 2

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.sametinget.se/129190>, dnr. 1.3.2-2019-764

- that long-term financing is secured and that mechanisms are in place to address unforeseen needs.
- That the funding should be independent of other efforts made by the State in the field of Sami politics.
- that the Commission should have an independent and strong mandate.
- That the members of the commission should have the utmost confidence from both the Swedish society and Sami community.
- That the process is anchored in the Sami community so that the work reaches different groups of Sami with widely different experiences in order to avoid more internal division in the Sami community.
- The early establishment of social and psychosocial support functions.
- Cross-border knowledge exchange continues with the ongoing processes in Norway and Finland.
- During the work process, to learn from the experience of international commissions.
- That the Sami Parliament will arrange meetings/hearings around Sweden to anchor the work in the Sami community and, based on the results, prepare the mandate for the Truth Commission.
- That the Truth Commission will be followed by a reconciliation process following the commission's completed work, given that the recommendations proposed by the Commission are met.

On Indigenous Peoples' Day on August 9, 2019, the remains of some 25 individuals were returned at a public repatriation ceremony in Lycksele. During the day, speeches were made by Helene Öberg, State Secretary to The Minister for Culture and Democracy Amanda Lind, who said in her speech that it was an important and priority issue for the government to seek knowledge of the history and its connection with today's conditions for the Sami. She also said that the government was in favor of establishing a truth commission in close cooperation with the Sami Parliament.<sup>12</sup> The Sami parliament wanted thus that the Sami community to be involved first and to have the opportunity to make input on the mandate of a truth commission before a commission is appointed. On 9 June 2020, the Ministry of Culture and Democracy announced that the Sami Parliament is granted project funding to inform and anchor the process of the work with the future truth commission in dialogue with the Sami community - relevant individuals, groups, associations and organizations - thereby creating the best possible conditions for the work with the commission.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The speech is reproduced in the report *Måhtsatiebmie likttemijne – Återbördande i försoning, en processbeskrivning över repatrieringen i Lycksele 2019* (Return in Reconciliation, a process description of the repatriation in Lycksele), by Adriana Aurelius.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2020/06/sametinget-far-medel-for-en-forankringsprocess-infor-kommande-sanningskommission/>

## 2. Foundation process

### Organization

The Sami Parliament's steering group for the project has consisted of four representatives of the Sami Parliament's Board of Directors and three representatives of the opposition. The steering group has consisted of Matti Blind Berg (Samelandspartiet), convening, Håkan Jonsson (Jakt- och fiskesamerna), Anders Kråik (Samerna), Marie Persson Njajta (Landspartiet Svenska Samer), Joakim Pååve (Álbmut), Jan Rannerud (Skogssamerna) and Marita Stinnerbom (Guovssonásti).

In addition to the close cooperation with the steering group, project manager Marie Enoksson has also had a reference group with representatives from Sami organizations at her disposal. It consisted of Mattias Kristoffersson (national organisation Samerna), Julia Rensberg (Saminuorra), Stefan Mikaelsson (Same Ätnam) and Naadja Östergren (Landsförbundet Svenska Samer). Two organisations chose to not participate, Renägarförbundet and Svenska Samernas Riksförbund.

The purpose of the foundation process was partly to inform and prepare the Sami community and partly to gather the opinions, thoughts and perspectives of the Sami people. Initially, the idea was to invite to hearings in various locations around Sápmi. As everyone knows, an unpredictable pandemic spread over the world, forcing the Sami Parliament to change its original plan.

### Budget

The funding of SEK 1.2 million made available to the Sami Parliament came through the Ministry of Employment grant *Measures against discrimination and racism etc.* and was to be used up in 2020, according to the regulatory letter, while the assignment was to be reported by 31 March 2021. Of these funds, less than SEK 0.3 million has been spent in 2020 as no hearings could be arranged. No new funds were allocated in 2021, but the assignment has been completed within the Sami Parliament's regular financial framework.

### Implementation

On 7 October 2020, an e-mail was sent to all Sami associations and Sami organizations in Sweden requesting interest to organize a member meeting with the project manager to discuss themes and pressing issues for an upcoming truth commission. The email pointed out that the truth commission had not yet started and that it was not the intention to collect testimony. A similar request was made to coordinators for minority languages in Sami language administrative municipalities.

The short timeframe and the tightened restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic prevented the implementation of the original physical consultations that were intended to take place at 15-30 locations in Sweden. The project plan was therefore revised by the steering group on 19 November. The dialogue meetings were complemented by a survey that was open between 23 November 2020 to 31 January 2021.

## Dialogue meetings

Several smaller meetings have been held during the project period. The last physical meeting was held in Kiruna on 11 November 2020. Since then, only digital meetings have been held through various conference systems. Despite these limitations, many valuable comments have been received from all over Sápmi. Although many voices are missing and for several reasons it has been most difficult for the oldest generations to participate, and despite hurdles, many different perspectives have been raised and the age of the participants has ranged from 15 years to over 80 years. The total number of participants at the completed information meetings has been just over 100 people, with Sami Parliament staff included, almost 150 people.

25 September 2020	Preparatory meeting with representatives of Sáhkie – Umeå Sami Association (3)
21 October 2020	Preparatory meeting with representatives of the Sami association in Lycksele and the Ume Sami association Álgguogáhtie (2)
28 October 2020	Information consultation group Gällivare municipality (20)
3 November 2020	Association of Concession Samebys (6)
4 November 2020	Digital meeting consultation group Bergs municipality (5)
6 November 2020	Digital meeting Saminuorra's Board of Directors (14)
11 November 2020	Physical meeting Sami Association in Kiruna (6)
17 November 2020	Digital meeting Consultation Group Arvidsjaur Municipality (6)
17 November 2020	Digital meeting Sami Association Arvidsjaur (9)
25 November 2020	Digital meeting Sami association in Östersund, Gaaltije and Consultation Group in the municipality (8)
26 November 2020	Digital meeting Consultation group Strömsund and Krokomb (6)
1 December 2020	Information meeting for Sami Parliament staff (digital staff conference)
3 December 2020	Digital meeting Sami Association in Ammarnäs/Sorsele (9)
7 December 2020	Digital meeting Same Ätnam (12)
19 January 2021	Digital meeting Vadtejen Saemiej Sijte and Vaapsten Sijte, Tärnaby (12)
21 January 2021	Digital meeting Consultation Group Dorotea (5)
10 February 2021	Digital meeting Consultation Group Åsele (6)

## The surveys

The steering group wanted to give the Sami community the opportunity to make their views known and therefore wanted a survey with open answers. The purpose of the foundation process was to reach the target group Sami. For this reason, the survey was not anonymous and the direct link to the survey was not posted on social media. The link to the survey was instead distributed via e-mail to Sami associations, organizations and Sami parties to forward to their members.

An information sheet on the possibility to submit comments via a survey was printed and sent to 9,200 people by post on the preliminary electoral roll in December 2020. Information about the survey was available on the Sami Parliament's website and a reminder was posted on the

Parliament's Facebook page before the survey closed. The information sheet was available digitally on the website, also in the Northern Sami, Lule Sami and Southern Sami languages.

The result was 336 digital survey responses and 71 written responses by post, a total of 407 responses and in addition to a dozen emails and phone calls. More than 500 people, together with the participants at the dialogue meetings, contributed to this report.

We note that more than 60 submissions with family trees and personal stories were received by letter and email from Forest Sami and Hunting and Fishing Sami in northern Finland addressed to the Sami Truth Commission in Sweden. These are not included in the sum above.

## Other contacts

Contacts have been made during the work process with the Sami Parliament in Finland and the ongoing Truth Commission for Sami, Kvens and Norwegian Finns in Norway, as well as with the *Kunskapsnätverket för samisk hälsa* (Knowledge Network for Sami Health). On 17 February 2021, the project manager participated in a seminar "100 years in the shadow of the Racial Biology Institute" organized by the Centre for Multidisciplinary Research on Racism, CEMFOR, Uppsala University. Professor emeritus Lars Elenius, member of the Truth Commission for Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaaisiens participated as well. On 12 March 2021, the project manager and Sami Parliament's chairman participated in a digital seminar on truth and reconciliation commissions organized by the Sami Parliament in Norway.



*Nomad school in Gällivare in the 1950s. Sami girls ride "trains" with kick sleds.  
Photo: Karl Heinz Hernried/Nordisk museet*

### 3. Expectations

The vast majority of Sami who responded to the survey and attended meetings express high or very high expectations of a future truth commission. Several of the responses express expectations that the commission will get to the bottom of wrongdoings and, by extension, lead to change in a number of ways.

*I expect that all the bitterness and hopelessness felt by many Sami people can disappear as a result of the Truth Commission and the measures to follow, or at least decrease significantly and be exchanged for some positivity. That you can start to feel like you can live like a human being in the lands of your ancestors. That you can feel a little dignity.*

*The goal must be for the truth to come out no matter how unpleasant and uncomfortable it is – and that the Commission will lead to a change in the situation and reality of the Sami people.*

The expectations expressed have different perspectives. There are expectations of apology and forgiveness, a great ceremony of some kind and an end to the abuse and criminalization of Sami. Here's an attempt to divide submitted comments into categories:

#### **A. Expectations of vindication and justice:**

- Sweden must take responsibility and admit its guilt
- All Sami should be treated equally
- The truth must come out and justice must be done
- That the state acknowledges abuses and actively works to restore relations
- That the state corrects errors made/reciprocating not only in words but in real deeds
- That the State reimburses the Sami for their suffering
- That reindeer husbandry may be carried out undisturbed
- Recognition and respect of ancient customs and practices
- Ending exploitation without the permission of the sameby
- That Sami should regain the right to their ancestors' lands
- Stolen lands to be returned
- Correct all injustices, everything should be put right
- Once and for all, tackle historical irregularities
- Respect, openness, recognition and transparency
- Sweden to sign ILO Convention 169
- Justice and truth will come out
- Sami remains and objects to be returned
- Our rights should be clarified
- Compensation for all land intrusions – but it is important that compensation does not extinguish Sami rights
- An end to the abuse and criminalization of Sami culture and life on the lands for all Sami
- Concrete measures, not just fine excuses and empty words
- Reconciliation is the goal but only if we lift everything, EVERYTHING must come to light

- Breaking colonial patterns, legislation, politics and abuses
- That the Sami should have a better situation at all levels, including health-wise
- That all Sami should be able to live and develop on their own terms, without struggle and conflict
- That the starting point should be everyone's equal rights, that is, that modern legal and international law should prevail when old and new wrongdoings are examined
- Swedish State shall apologize
- The Prime Minister shall ask for forgiveness on behalf of Swedish State
- A great ceremony – everyone needs to know

**B. Expectations of an impartial and objective Commission:**

- That the Truth Commission works objectively on all issues
- That the Commission highlights the entire Sami people
- All facts shall be reported with citations
- That the truth will come out
- That different perspectives are highlighted with respect
- It shall be comprehensive
- It shall be implemented with the aim of leading to change, not just as a means of being freed from guilt
- It shall have a broad representation
- The stories of the Sami should be the voices that define the problem

**C. Expectations of less racism and discrimination against the Sami:**

- That the Truth Commission highlights/refers to and acknowledges wrongdoings and abuses inflicted and were made possible by Sweden having political, institutional, social structures that regarded and responded to Sami as inferior
- That all racism should come to the surface
- Reduced discrimination
- The state must come to a deal with its racist history and ideology, so that in the present they become aware that they are still in favour of a structural racist policies towards indigenous Sami through current legislation
- Action against racial discrimination of all kinds
- Zero tolerance of discrimination against Sami and the Sami language

**D. Expectations of increased right to education for Sami to reclaim language, culture and history:**

- Greater opportunities to learn your language
- Better mother tongue teaching
- Parents' right to language teaching
- That adults are entitled to paid Sami language classes
- That children and adults are more easily able to relearn their language
- More support for the Sami language and culture
- To be able to learn more about your Sami history and taking it back
- That work begins on writing indigenous Sami history

**E. Expectations of a united Sami community:**

- A unification of the Sami
- A united people with the same rights
- The burden of guilt and shame should be lifted
- Reconciliation and inclusion of all Sami
- Unity and understanding and respect for each other
- All Sami should have equal value both in school and in everyday life
- That everyone who is Sami can be Sami with the same rights and obligations
- Going back to before the Sami were divided and when land rights were not confiscated by the State

**F. Expectations on increased Sami stewardship:**

- Giving the Sami cultural sector the opportunity for greater autonomy
- The state can return financial resources to the Sami, such as Sami administration, allowing the Sami parliament to manage land, schools, etc.
- Increased self-determination
- The State will work seriously on the Sami issues together with the Sami
- More advice for the Sami – what can we do to develop, educate and preserve our culture and community?
- A substantial package of measures that can seriously and with sufficient resources build the Sami people's self-esteem in terms of language, culture and business

**G. Expectations that the work of the Truth Commission will lead to increased knowledge and better education about Sami in Swedish society:**

- Increased understanding and knowledge
- More teaching in the school about Sami history, about Sweden's crimes against the Sami
- Increased enlightenment and understanding
- A modern telling of history
- Teaching in schools about Sweden's colonial past
- Deeper insight and knowledge among the public
- Books, exhibitions, TV shows
- Sweden's majority population must be given increased knowledge of past and present wrongdoings committed against Sami
- That the Commission will succeed in gathering sufficient evidence and testimonies to lead to insight and change among the Swedish population

There are also a few examples of negative reactions. These range from total suspicion ("just nonsense") to distrust ("do not have very high expectations"). This mistrust is directed at the State, not at the truth commission itself.



Quotes:

*Can we believe that the government is serious? Will it just be an “We are sorry”, or will a truth commission result in some sort of change?*

*Is the truth commission going to be just another procrastination process, a pretext for doing nothing at all? Then we’re going to wait 10 years for the result?*

*It doesn’t seem like the government is absorbing anything of what is said, no matter what government it is, they’re reluctant to give anything back at all.*

*One way for the state to show goodwill would be to first ratify ILO 169 and then set up a truth commission, then you would have thought they were serious.*

*We have banged our heads bloody against a wall when it comes to the Swedish State. Our voice will not be heard. Why would it be any different now?*



*Trading between Sami and passengers at S/S Aeolus in Tromsø harbour in 1910.  
The Sami hold a bunch of knives, reindeer antlers and pipes.  
Photographer unknown/Sjöhistoriska museet.*

## 4. Covered themes

It is striking how many coherent proposals on themes emerge in conversations and surveys. There is also a great deal of consensus on the impossibility of discerning single themes for a truth commission to focus on. State policy towards the Sami have affected so many areas that they are in reality intertwined. The main features of the themes that emerged during the anchoring process are described below.

### A divided people

Many people express sadness that the Sami have become such a divided people where different groups stand against each other. In the 1960s, Sami professor Israel Ruong (1903-1986) coined the term "category splitting" to describe how the Reindeer Grazing Act of 1928 had cut like a sharp knife through Sami groups and separated people who naturally belonged together. In addition to distinguishing the Sami, additional restrictions were imposed on reindeer husbandry rights. The legislator wanted to ensure that what was termed 'Lapp privilege' – thus, the right to reindeer husbandry, hunting and fishing – would not extend beyond those who, in the eyes of the State, needed it. Different forms of reindeer husbandry were pitted against each other and Sami in other traditional industries such as hunting, fishing and handicrafts were excluded from the rights system. The dual policy of the State was, on the one hand, a policy of segregation and, on the other, an assimilation policy, dependent on belonging and place of residence. The "Lapp shall remain Lapp" ideology was the discourse that influenced all State Sami politics, including the Nomadic School Act and the Reindeer Grazing Act. This division is an old heritage with which the Sami community still lives. It is not just a division between reindeer herding and non-reindeer herding Sami. There are also dividing lines within the groups for both historical and geographical reasons, depending, among other things, on the progress of colonization and Swedish-assimilation policy, *Swedification*, the forced displacements and the actions of the Church, Lapp administration and county administrative boards. The government at the time sowed division between Sami children, created a hierarchy of Sami and an identity-lessness of some Sami who ended up outside or who, for various external reasons, "opted out" of a stigmatized, undesirable Sami identity at the time.

*We are divided into two parts – that's how the State sees us, and we look at ourselves. But it is not us that caused the split. Colonization has divided us Sami as a people and pitted us against each other.*

*The fragmentation of the Sami must be investigated as this has led to internal conflicts that have divided families and relatives*

*Reindeer husbandry becomes a conflict area, but it should not be. Reindeer husbandry is central and has, after all, meant that we are where we are today – but it should not be as firmly linked to identity as Sami. We need to broaden our vision. Why do we have to have reindeer? You should be able to be Sami without reindeer if we strengthen other arenas. Why is the reindeer the only thing that counts? Why are we questioning each other?*

*For me, it is important that the link between the forced displacements, the Reindeer Grazing Act, the Sami communities, the racial biology, the nomadic school, the ban on the use of the Sami language, the*

*unwillingness to ratify the ILO Convention 169, the disputes brought forth by the Sami communities in the courts and the colonization of Sápmi are really made clear. These are not individual events and when they are put together, the understanding of the vulnerability that Sami experience today increases.*

### *Sami outside the samebys/ State's impact on Sami rights*

The term *sameby* was introduced in connection with the 1886 Reindeer Grazing Act. A *sameby* is a reindeer-herding community as well as the geographical area in which the members are entitled to pursue reindeer husbandry.

The most common stereotypical image of a Sami is a reindeer herding man on a mountain. But not all Sami have been reindeer herders throughout history. Some Sami have lived by hunting and/or fishing. Others took up farming early on or were seen as settlers when they registered new homesteads to protect their Lapp tax lands. Combination livelihoods have been common, a mutual relationship between several different livelihoods in order to survive in an Arctic climate. All natural livelihoods that occur in rural areas have been practiced by the Sami, in different ways in different geographical areas. The Sami have also engaged in trade and sales. On the Norwegian side, Sami were Coastal Sami or Sea Sami and in some areas Sami have been skilled boat builders or sheep farmers. The image of the Sami needs to be broadened and expanded. In Norway, Sami identity is not as associated with reindeer husbandry as in Sweden.

A majority of today's Sami are descendants of Sami who were not reindeer herders, or reindeer herding Sami who lost their reindeer during the famine years of the 1930s, who opted out of reindeer husbandry for one reason or another, or who were forced to give up reindeer husbandry due to competition for the land. Within this group, the stories and fates of lives vary greatly. There is also a geographical difference depending on the region in which you live; Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland/ Härjedalen, Västernorrland or Dalarna. In the inland region of Norrbotten, the land was not particularly suitable for cultivation, but further south the cultivation and colonization increased in the 19th century, putting pressure on Sami community. With the "Lapp shall remain Lapp" ideology, reindeer-owning Sami who acquired cows and started with small farms were questioned, as were the Forest Sami who built timbered huts. They represented "an adverse mixture of civilization and nomadism"<sup>14</sup> and would ideally cease practicing reindeer husbandry. Many survey responses describe the experiences of this group of Sami. The most prominent features of the descendants are the grief, struggle, difficulties and discrimination they have witnessed and live with in order to transfer their Sami livelihoods, lifestyles and rights to their children.

Several survey responses believe that the county administrative boards and their predecessors need to be examined. An informant notes that different officials at the County Administrative Boards of Norrbotten and Västerbotten seem to have interpreted and applied the 1971 Reindeer Husbandry Act in different ways, which has led to that the consequences of the law affect the Sami in the two counties in different ways.<sup>15</sup> Norrbotten has many reindeer owners, but in Västerbotten reindeer herding is not as common. In Norrbotten, families have been able to stay in reindeer husbandry and *samebys*, despite the fact that they only own a couple of reindeer and many families have been able to retain their membership in the *sameby* and thus

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<sup>14</sup> "The Lapp is fickle, unsteady and uncomfortable" (translation fr. Swedish) Lennart Lundmark, pg. 67 (2002).

<sup>15</sup> The informant refers to an essay written by Peter Engström in the early 2000s.

have the legal right to farm their traditional Sami lands, hunt, fish and take handicraft materials, which in turn has made it possible to transfer traditional Sami knowledge to the next generation. The informant notes that legal rights also entail a psychological *raison d'être* (reason for existence). Other Sami live with a constant struggle to this day and feel both discriminated against and harassed by the county administrative board for not being able to prove membership in a *sameby*, even though they still live in the area where their ancestors have always lived. They may have inherited cottages, huts and fishing grounds that they no longer have the right to use. In those areas where the issue of membership is more fluid, remnants of the old *Siida* system remain in practice.<sup>16</sup> There, Sami who no longer live off reindeer husbandry may have the opportunity to participate in other reindeer husbandry work and continue to use cottages and fishing waters under the leasing system that exists.

The Sami who are currently outside reindeer herding are a multifaceted group. Since reindeer husbandry is a family-based natural industry, incomes and employment rates may vary between years. At certain times, some have sought other livelihoods to help the family's financial situation. In addition, requirements for rationalization and economic viability of reindeer husbandry companies (or, in other words, the Western economic system) have made it unsustainable for individual families and individuals to continue reindeer husbandry.

*The county administrative boards, through regulations, interpreted and curtailed the rights of permanent Sami residents their fishing rights, ptarmigan snaring, demolishing and burning Sami cultural remains for Sami who have not been affiliated to samebys, and have denied Sami the right to put huts on their ancestors' land. Denied hunting rights. Eliminated reindeer marks belonging to families. The County Administrative Board is the enforcer of laws and they have done so through free interpretation. Furthermore, this interpretation of laws has differed between the counties.*

*I want it not only to be about the historical discrimination practiced by the state, but also to focus on the discrimination and abuse that the government still practices today against the Sami outside the samebys.*

*Throughout the last century, laws built on colonialism have been adapted to reindeer husbandry and served as business laws. Laws that have hit hard against Sami outside reindeer herding. Distributed the rights differently, made invisible and divided. Laws that have curtailed all Sami rights in different ways.*

*I feel like a Lapp as I do not have rights as a Sami but am still not Swedish. I have family in Norway, Finland and Sweden. My wife is also Sami - her grandfather and uncles have reindeer - but she is not allowed to go to their cabin in the mountains because she is not a member of the sameby and is not allowed to become a member of the sameby. This means that my children cannot go and see places where their ancestors have cottages and reindeer and see their origins. The trails do not lead there directly and if you advert from the trail and are not a sameby member, the county administrative board will come after you by helicopter within an hour when sameby members report us. I have experienced this in real life.*

*The state must also ensure the rights of non-reindeer herders who have traditionally lived from hunting, fishing and handicrafts. We live in constant fear of the county administrative board/State that can take*

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<sup>16</sup> <http://samer.se/siidasamhallet>

*away our right to hunting and fishing at any time and burn down our huts. It is not worthy of a rule of law State like Sweden. And it is a colonialist mindset that still permeates the State.*

*I would particularly like to highlight the County Administrative Board of Västerbotten and its handling of Sami for a long time. Elimination of reindeer marks is one area, since a reindeer mark is an inheritance and a property. The County Administrative Board has been active in my area through the exclusion of the Sami in the area and made it impossible to exercise cultural heritage by declaring it illegal. A life that could include combinations of ancestral livelihoods, reindeer husbandry, fishing, small scale farming and traditional hunting have been stopped and prevented handing down to the next generation. Knowledge of names in the southern Sami language in traditional use of nature and its land and water has disappeared through this handling in my area.*

*My father combined reindeer husbandry and farming. I was expected to take over the reindeer mark but I was poorly inclined and my interest was greater in technology and vehicles. But at the time I didn't know that it would mean that I was then excluded from the sameby and would be chased by the county administrative board. The fishing and reindeer keeper's hut that we have in our family's traditional site came close to being burned down. But when we agreed to give the sameby access to it, it was left alone. But we have to pay rent, and part of that amount goes to intrusion compensation for the sameby. The fact that my family and I are considered an intrusion of this place is offensive. Of course, we have family in the sameby and a good relationship with them. But if we hadn't, what would have happened? It feels extremely unfair and not like you are part of a people, but are a problem. In addition, the cottage is in a nature reserve. That's decided by the State, not us Sami. Therefore, I am even more excluded from my traditional lands, which I cherish and know every stone and twig on. I went to this lake before the hut was built, sometimes with my father, sometimes with grandmother. We fished there and not in the big lake in the valley where we live. Sometimes we also crossed the mountain to the next lake, the northern border of our Lapp tax land. But the hut we had there has collapsed and I'm not allowed to drive there by snowmobile. We've always lived here. The fact that the State is telling us that we pose a threat to this environment makes me so angry and sad. My father was not allowed to attend Swedish school but was still not allowed to speak his mother tongue. I wasn't allowed to go to nomadic school and learn Sami because we had cows. There's so much that's sickening about how we've been treated by the government, and still are. Young boys tell us to drive home, or there's going to be a police report. We feel hunted. I'm almost 80 years old. I want to see a real apology and then an improvement for my people before I die.*

*We feel violated and hurt and want to draw the world's attention to the situation of all Sami in Sweden. Fate of a Sami family: Brother No 1 is a member of a sameby while brother No 2 is not. Brother No 1 can hunt, fish and move his reindeer on their ancestors' privately owned Lapp tax land while brother No 2 is completely without rights to the same. If he hunts and fishes on the lands of his ancestors, he is sentenced to prison. This is the reality for most Sami in Sweden today. Sweden has completely failed in its minority policy when the State linked the Sami's common rights and Sami culture to the reindeer and the economic association, the sameby. With this system, the majority of Sami are left without rights.*

*The part of the Sami population that has been deprived of its country, its language, its cultural identity has also seen a limited right to hunting and fishing and to uphold the land of its ancestors. The Sami population outside the samebys is completely without rights from an indigenous perspective.*

*When my mother died, none of her daughters were allowed to take over her reindeer mark. Her reindeer mark, like many others, was "killed" and announced in the daily press by the County Administrative Board. There was never any question that it had any value and would be compensated for in any way.*

*On the basis of the understanding that Sami land use/cultural practice is based on ancient and customary practice, today's particularly unjust situation must be examined with regard to the right to exercise one's rights. If the state "prohibited" certain Sami from exercising their rights, such as fishing, at some point during the 20th century and thus illegally prevented Sami from exercising their right, then it must be corrected. You cannot allow anti-Sami paragraphs that have only existed for a number of decades of Sami millennia-old history to define away the Sami.*

*Grandfather, who was Forest Sami, refused to teach Sami to his children because of the hard pressure on the Sami. He became a good small farmer, but he still had his reindeer mark that my uncle inherited. My mother never learned a word of Sami, she became very Swedish but retained much of the Sami knowledge about food and various Sami handicrafts. It was only when the Sami Parliament was formed that we started to talk more seriously about our history. There is a sadness living within me and many of my family and relatives. The new generation is starting to take back our heritage and that feels hopeful.*

### *Expatriate Sami*

It is a myth that Stockholm is Sweden's largest sameby. However, many Sami live in southern Sweden, who have moved out of the traditional areas because of work or love. It may also be land exploitation (such as hydropower expansion) that has forced Sami families to move and find livelihoods elsewhere. The Sami Parliament's electoral roll reveals that there are Sami in almost every municipality of Sweden. There are Sami associations both in Skåne and Gothenburg. The exodus also took place in connection with the other migrations from northern Sweden to the growing industrial cities in southern Sweden in connection with the large wave of migrations in the 1970s. Among these are Sami with both weak and strong Sami identities, with more or less strong connections to a certain geographical area that is still very much alive in the family today.

A completely invisible group consists of Sami who at a young age have left their Sami context and may never even tell their spouse or children that they are Sami. It can also be Sami who have been removed through adoption or placed in foster care far from their Sami context. They are Sami with a lost Sami identity who are not sure if they will belong. For their children, the revelation of Sami heritage can come as a shock and make them feel betrayed by their parent and robbed of their history and cultural heritage.

*Once in the late 1990s, I gave a talk about Sami women throughout history at a museum in Stockholm. Afterwards, I noticed a woman in her 75s and 80s who lingered when the other audience members started going out. I walked up to her, and she said thank you. "I think this was very interesting!" she said. She was shorter than me and had traits that felt very familiar. I said, "Do you by chance have roots to the north?" "Yes," she said a little bothered, "I was born in Arjeplog." I carefully asked if it was even possible that she had Sami family. Then she shyed even more and looked down. "Yes ... I was then a Lapp girl as a child..." I put my hand on her arm and said, "Then I think you still are!" A little moved but happy, she looked me right in the eye and replied: "Do you think so?!" It turned out that as a*

*teenager she had found work as a maid with a wealthy family in Östermalm. There she had fallen in love with a man who also worked for the family, and they had eventually resigned, married and formed a family. She had never told her husband that she was Sami, nor to her children. Before we parted, she had promised me to talk to her children about their origins, her husband was no longer alive. I often think of her and hope she took the courage to finally tell them.*

### *Segregation and assimilation*

At the end of the 19th century, Swedish politicians began to consider it necessary to control reindeer husbandry more tightly so that it would not disturb the resident population and other industries. When the Swedish Parliament passed the first reindeer grazing law in 1886, the main purpose was to legally regulate the relationship between agriculture and reindeer husbandry and formalize the Sami's right to reindeer grazing. The law did not explicitly define which were included by the legislation. In the same law, reindeer husbandry below the Lappmark border was banned. The idea was that the old Lapp tax lands would be abolished, and reindeer husbandry rights become collective, but this was not clearly stated. A 'Lapp committee' was set up in 1895 and it proposed that each 'lappby' (earlier version of a sameby) should have its own order, which was introduced into the Reindeer Grazing Act 1898.

Later, the State considered it necessary to further specify the rights of the Sami and limit them to a smaller group. In the spring of 1917, a bill on the "Lapp issue" was presented to parliament; an audit of the 1898 Reindeer Grazing Act. The bill was influenced by the "Lapp shall remain Lapp" ideology. The essence was to make it impossible for Sami to both acquire permanent settlement, take up farming and continue with reindeer husbandry. To be defined as Sami, it required a nomadic life, having reindeer and living in a hut. The right to reindeer husbandry, hunting and fishing would not extend beyond those deemed necessary by the State. The mountain Sami would be "preserved" and protected from civilization at the same time as a Lapp bailiff system was developed to control them. The Forest Sami were considered so influenced by civilization that their reindeer husbandry and housing types rather posed a threat to nomadic life and therefore they would be assimilated.

### *Consequences of the 1928 legislation*

In the 1928 Reindeer Grazing Act, the State defined for the first time who should be considered as Sami and the right to reindeer husbandry was restricted. The right to carry out reindeer husbandry would only apply to Sami who were members of a 'lappby', as it was then called. In practice, this meant that the State divided the Sami into two categories: Sami with membership, and Sami without membership in lappby. Through the law, other parts of Sami culture became invisible and the right to using resources was restricted as time passed. With the then prevailing Darwinian-culture view of Sami, Sami identity was also stigmatized. It was simply not nice to be Sami and individuals could play down their Sami identity to avoid physical abuses.

The 1928 Reindeer Grazing Act explicitly discriminated against Forest Sami. According to Section 3(3), Forest Sami would make way for both farmers and mountain Sami if requested.<sup>17</sup> The law also discriminated women. Sami women who married Swedes lost their reindeer husbandry rights, while Swedish women who married reindeer herders acquired reindeer herding rights.<sup>18</sup> Although the legislation on reindeer husbandry has changed over the years, it has historically meant that the status of women has been both dependent on men and explicitly linked to reindeer husbandry.

Reindeer herding Sami were also negatively affected by being subjected to segregation. For example, they were not allowed to build houses, own land or register land for settlement. The children were to attend a nomad school. They were assumed to not be capable of supervising themselves, so they were placed under the guardianship of the State by the Lapp administration. The Lapp bailiffs would make decisions in their place. The Lapp administrations in Norrbotten, Västerbotten and Jämtland affected not only the Sami community but also Swedish Sami politics at the central level, as the Lapp bailiffs claimed to speak for the Sami. When investigations about Sami were carried out, it was always Swedish officials who expressed their views, not the Sami themselves. The system of Lapp supervisors and Lapp bailiffs remained in place until 1971. With the Reindeer Husbandry Act 1971, the old Lapp administration was transferred to a new authority, but with the same officials. In other words, old structures persisted even if the titles were replaced.<sup>19</sup>

### *Today's samebys*

The reindeer herding Sami are not a homogeneous group. There are different conditions in mountain samebys, forest samebys and concession samebys.<sup>20</sup> There are differences between geographical areas; North, Lule, and Southern Sami areas, and within the samebys. The samebys' land use in the reindeer herding area is a right of use based on ancient history. The land has been used for reindeer husbandry for so long that no one knows when the tradition started or how it came about.

Reindeer herding Sami today face many challenges. The problems highlighted by representatives of the reindeer industry are predatory animal policies and increasing disturbances from other land users linked to, for example, wind power, forestry, infrastructure, mining and tourism. Reindeer herders are also concerned about climate-change.<sup>21</sup> On top of this, the samebys are to have the time, energy and enough expertise to be able to defend and explain the reindeer's needs and their land rights in meetings and consultations with companies and municipalities that have trained and paid lawyers, community planners, consultants and others. It is a problem that traditional knowledge is

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<sup>17</sup> Section 3(3) of the Reindeer Grazing Act 1928: "In respect of certain areas, the exercise of the right conferred on the Forest Sami under 1 and 2 VAT is particularly onerous for the farming population or impediment to the or cause significant obstacles or damage to mountain reindeer husbandry, may the King order that the area may not be used for forest cleaning."

<sup>18</sup> Sápmi in the age of change: a study of the living conditions of Swedish Sami during the 20th century from a gender and ethnicity perspective, Andrea Amft (2000)

<sup>19</sup> Lappväsendet (Lapp administration) – application of Swedish Sami politics 1885-1971, Patrik Lantto (2012)

<sup>20</sup> Read more about reindeer husbandry on the Sami Parliament's website: [https://www.sametinget.se/rennaring\\_sverige](https://www.sametinget.se/rennaring_sverige)

<sup>21</sup> Sami council's survey of reindeer owners as a basis for the development of a reindeer husbandry policy strategy (2020).



rarely valued or accorded the same value as scientific knowledge. Reindeer herders feel that they fall outside the Swedish legal system. Logging is defined as ongoing land use and decisions by the Swedish Forest Agency cannot be appealed. The Environmental Code and the Mineral Act do not consider the cumulative effects of intrusions into the reindeer herding area. The legislation is not adapted to and does not take into account traditional Sami knowledge, Sami needs and the needs of reindeer. It is not unusual for the constant pressure and feeling of powerlessness that reindeer herding Sami live under to manifest themselves in mental illness and/or other problems and conflicts.<sup>22</sup>

Without natural grazing and green infrastructure, it is not possible to carry out sustainable reindeer husbandry. Climate change, with poor grazing winters, high predator pressure and land exploitation combined with increased costs of support feeding and continued low slaughter yields, is causing a declining economy that needs to be managed by an increasing number of reindeer herding entrepreneurs. In one generation, the forest landscape has changed from natural forest to planted industrial forest so that forest land rich in lichens has decreased by over 70 percent since 1955.<sup>23</sup> Already in the 1960s and 1970s, Forest Sami reindeer husbandry was affected by large-scale forestry. Today, large-scale forestry affects all samebys and has become one of the land users that causes the greatest interference in nature and thus damage both to reindeer grazing and to Sami archeological remains.<sup>24</sup>

Reindeer-herding Sami must often bear the brunt of much of the anger towards Sami that exists in some areas and sometimes manifests in cruelty to reindeer or angry discussions on social media. Local municipal politicians in many cases fuel conflict and make it an election issue that "everyone should be allowed to hunt and fish on equal terms" and argue that it belongs to "everyone's equal value". They ignore the fact that Sweden has colonized Sami areas and that reindeer husbandry rights are constitutionally protected civil rights. On social media, racism and hostility towards Sami is quite visible. Recurring views are that the debate has become polarized due to the fact that Sami rights have been recognized in court (Girjas case). Many social media posts suggest an unclear notion of justice, Sami history and ancient history. A truth commission can spread knowledge both in Swedish society and the Sami community about the colonization process and what ideologies were behind the driven Sami policy.

*Today we see conflicts on many levels, including between locals and samebys. If Sami history had been widely known, I believe that some conflicts could have been avoided. By just scratching the surface, I think it often becomes a case of "fighting fire with fire" because you have never dug deep into what actually creates conflicts. It is about the right to land and water, predatory issues and other rights. The Swedish state has great responsibility in why Sami community is divided today.*

*It is important that the Commission highlights and develops forms of lasting coexistence – fully in line with the statement made by the Chairman of Girjas Sameby in connection with the proclamation of the ruling in the so-called Girjas case (on the right to small game hunting and fishing). That they work to*

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<sup>22</sup> Knowledge overview on Sami psychosocial ill health, Jon Petter Stoor (2016), [https://www.sametinget.se/psykosocial\\_ohalsa](https://www.sametinget.se/psykosocial_ohalsa)

<sup>23</sup> Sami Parliament annual report 2019, p. 55, <https://www.sametinget.se/143808>

<sup>24</sup> Statement from Sami Parliament 2020-11-27: <https://www.sametinget.se/155898>

*ensure that Sami are informed, consulted and involved in matters relating to them and their lands, that the majority society respects the views and perspectives of the Sami.*

*It is deeply regrettable that the Swedish state is still neglecting the Forest Sami reindeer industry. In conclusion, we can say with great sadness that the Swedish state has abused forest reindeer husbandry so vigorously that it is now almost wiped out.*

*Those of us who did not stop forest reindeer husbandry had to be very careful. We were afraid, we were careful to do everything exactly right so as not to irritate the Lapp bailiff. No one would have reason to complain.*

*To this day, the Forest Sami are still ignored, if not forgotten. The 2,000 pages of the Church of Sweden's White Book, which touches on the Church's abusive behavior towards the Sami, makes no mention of the guardianship and devaluation afflicted the Forest Sami as a group.*

*As recently as the 1940s, the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten County forcibly displaced a number of reindeer-herding Forest Sami families. This was done with the support of the Reindeer Husbandry Act of 1928.*

*Why do we have different systems/rights in reindeer husbandry in Sweden? We should be equal and subject to the same legislation.*

*We have had to accept that our rights have diminished, and no one has been on our side. Our existence is at stake. The mining industry is growing, the forest is being destroyed and grazing areas are shrinking. The State divides and rules to make it impossible for reindeer herding to survive.*

*Should Sweden have all these predators in the reindeer herding areas? If the answer is yes, then the decision-makers must also do something radical on the issue of compensation, for example, killed reindeer cows must be compensated for based on their age and the return they could have provided for the rest of their lives.*

*The Reindeer Grazing Act of 1928 and its discriminatory effect. The majority of Sami end up in humiliation, emptiness without identity, ownership or livelihood. This has created divisions between Sami. The Swedish state's "Divide and Rule" technique has had excellent results.*

### *Sami in the concession area*

When Forest Sami reindeer husbandry was banned below the Lappmark border in 1886, it had major consequences for Forest Sami in Tornedalen, the Torne River Valley. Reindeer herding Sami who had been reindeer herding along the Torne and Kalix river valleys at least since the 18th century had to move their reindeer herds to the other side of the Lappmark border or slaughter their reindeer. These Sami were deprived of the right to reindeer husbandry and livelihood without compensation when the decision was to be implemented in 1917. However, since there were farmers protesting and speaking in favor of the Sami cause, in 1933 a new decision was made to allow reindeer husbandry with special permission (concession) to be renewed every year (now every five years). After 1933, some families returned to their traditional areas and continued reindeer husbandry under the new conditions.

According to the Sami in the concession area, their Forest Sami history is completely invisible, they cannot claim ancient history and have no representation in SSR, *Svenska Samernas Riksförbund* (National Union of the Swedish Sami). The general feeling is that they are left out and that no one is pursuing their case. They are also not allowed to represent themselves or participate in government investigations involving them. If samebys in general find it difficult to get a response from the national forest companies, the concession samebys find it even more difficult. They do not count as category 3 (indigenous peoples) according to the FSC but as category 4 (local population).

Muonio concession sameby has long struggled to regain forest sameby status. Since 2007, when the Sami Parliament took over reindeer husbandry issues from the Swedish Board of Agriculture, responsibility for all samebys except the concession samebys lies under the Sami Parliament. Responsibility for the concession samebys remains with the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten. In recent years, the conditions for reindeer husbandry in Muonio have completely changed, especially the previously functioning cooperation with the national forestry company Sveaskog. When the mining company Northland started up the mine in Kaunisvaara, an agreement was entered into with the sameby that both parties were satisfied with, but after the mine went bankrupt and the new mining company Kaunis Iron took over, no new agreements have been entered into and no compensation has been paid to the sameby. When things like these happen, there is no regulatory framework and no structures to deal with the situation, the Sami communities are powerless.<sup>25</sup>

*How could one make the decision to make Forest Sami reindeer husbandry invisible and "push" it down to a concession? How did it happen? That violation has even been incorporated into Sami community and become a truth, that the concession samebys are not true samebys and that reindeer husbandry should stop. The Sami continue to colonize their own and keep to the State's affairs.*

*It is difficult to be a reindeer herder in the northern Torne Valley and within Pajala municipality today, being worked against from several different directions and I fear that we will soon be the last generation of Forest Sami reindeer herders in Muonio sameby. We are being discouraged by Pajala municipality, the county administrative board, Sveaskog and in some cases other samebys who claim that we have less right to be here because we are called a concession sameby.*

*It is important that it is clear how the sameby was converted into a concession sameby, among other things, the reindeer herders were threatened with not being allowed to continue with reindeer husbandry, and the authorities also benefited from the fact that Sami did not always understand the Swedish language. It is important that it is clear what consequences it had for the Sami over time and that the county administrative board has used its power and continues to do so in order to suppress the Sami in Muonio sameby.*

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.sametinget.se/136482>



Foto: Manker, Ernst

Nordiska museet

*Interior of a hut from Teukkajärvi, Tuolpukka, 1932. The hut belongs to the widow Inger Sevä who in the photo sits next to a pot.  
Photographer: Ernst Manker/Nordiska museet.*

## Loss of land rights

The land issue is a central theme that many Sami mention in their survey responses, such as the right to land and water, delimitation of land, the Lapp tax lands, industrialization and the loss of land rights. Many want the Truth Commission to examine how Sami lands came under State control. Some give historical descriptions and go back in history to the 16th century when Gustav Vasa wrote that "the Lapps own mobile and immobile in Lapland", and in 1789 when the taxation laws for farmers and lappbys were equated with that of nobility. In 1793, "an administrative coup" is said to have been carried out in Jokkmokk when the duties of district court were taken over by the Crown's official. In this way, the decision-making power over the Lapp tax lands had "slipped over" to the Crown. In the 19th century, it was reported that Sami were disadvantaged by decision-makers manipulating the land accounting.

Lappbys and new settlements paid taxes for their properties for hundreds of years. There were no officially drawn up maps from the outset, but the tax collection was based on customary practice and verbal agreements. In 1671, a survey of the Lapp tax lands in Västerbotten was carried out on behalf of Governor Johan Graan. The map is still preserved and shows that all the land about 60-70 km from the coast up to the mountains was Sami Lapp tax land. Sami who paid tax for the land lived on the Lapp tax land until the 1920s, even though the Lapp tax lands were abolished by the Reindeer Grazing Act of 1898.

The delimitation of land began in Jämtland and then continued in Norrbotten and Västerbotten. In the traditional Sami lands, people began to settle down. Many of these were Sami who, among other things, lived on combination farming and had registered new homesteads on their Lapp tax lands to defend and consolidate their lands. Others came from a Swedish or Finnish farming population, depending on their geographical area. When the delimitation was completed, parts of the Lapp tax land became private land. The rest of the lappby land, both in the Lappmarks and in Jämtland-Härjedalen's tax mountains, was changed from "Lapp tax" to "krono" (Crown) in the land ownership books and began to be called "*kronoöverloppsmark*", Crown land. No ordinance or new taxing took place. The State's position was that the "farming people" should own their land. On the other hand, the State considered that 'nomads' could not own land and therefore granted themselves ownership of the 'Crown land'. In Forest Sami areas, the delimitation of Lapp tax land meant that many Sami were forced to give up reindeer husbandry, due to the wording of the Reindeer Grazing Act of 1928.<sup>26</sup> The same was true of the many Mountain Sami who combined livelihoods. In Jämtland-Härjedalen, the delimitation of land was stopped in 1841. Later, the State purchased land on behalf of the reindeer herding Sami, known as *skattefjäll*, tax mountains.

A great deal of today's problems in within the Sami community were created by the nations in connection with colonization. With an incipient industrialization, it was in the State's interest to acquire forests, rivers and mining land. The Sami stood in the way of the extraction of natural resources and the nations wanted to consolidate ownership of the land. One of many

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<sup>26</sup> Section 3(3) of the Reindeer Grazing Act 1928: "In respect of certain areas, the exercise of the right conferred on the Forest Lapps under items 1 and 2 is particularly onerous for the farming population or impediment to the or cause significant obstacles or damage to mountain reindeer husbandry, may the King order that the area may not be used for forest reindeer husbandry."

examples is the extensive hydropower regulations that took place in various areas in the early and mid-20th centuries. Suddenly, entire families faced ultimatums to move their settlements or be drenched in water. Houses and huts were demolished and reindeer grazing grounds and cultivated land were flooded. Fishing changed and the ice became treacherous when nature was transformed by the expansion of hydropower.

*My family has moved three times for the water regulations. These have divided families who have been forced to enter into agreements with Vattenfall (Swedish hydropower company). If you didn't agree to a deal, there was a threat that our homes would be expropriated. Vattenfall's powerful, arrogant men led our ancestors and parents to finally give up and accept the water regulations. We had to clear the beaches around our settlements that were eventually burned down. We had to move to new places and rebuild new settlements and housing. As a child, experiencing playgrounds and homes disappearing underwater and moving away from all the water dams has left a mark for life. A childhood that still hurts. Where was my home?*

*My expectations are that the Truth Commission will investigate how it was possible for the State to confiscate large land properties for which Sami owned and paid taxes, without paying any compensation or that it was possible for rights holders to appeal.*

*When the settlers came and the farmers settled here, the farmers were allocated the forest around from the Lapp tax lands - which then became commons. And these commons are now extorting the samebys/ reindeer herders. The Sami communities do not find it so easy to say no in consultations, then the commons can say "let's take that part instead", which can be great grazing areas – i.e. extortion tactics.*

*The dubious expropriations and devastation of our natural resources by forest companies, mining and Vattenfall must be incorporated into the work of the Truth Commission. Not only an apology must be given, but also a reprimand and compensation on the part of the State to all those who have been forced to leave reindeer herding with all its rights to use land and water.*

*Why are Sami rights worth less than Swedish ownership? It's because of the racial disparity policy.*

*Anyone of Sami descent who has inhabited the same area since time immemorial should never be denied their right to use their land for hunting and fishing. I believe that the State should give back land to the Sami whose ancestors had Lapp-tax land. I also believe that the state should give back hay meadows and other land that has been stolen. There should be several investigations into what land is referred to as 'State' which has actually been unfairly given State ownership.*

*The Truth Commission must deal with 1. How the right to land and water has been deprived of Sami who are not affiliated to samebys created by Swedish legislation. 2. How legislation pertaining to Sami rights has discriminated against Sami outside reindeer husbandry. 3. How the county administrative board has, through regulations, deprived Sami outside samebys of the right to fish, ptarmigan snaring; burnt and demolished cultural remains. 4. How Sami rights were dismantled when the Lapp tax lands were abolished.*



*Sirka's sameby, Vaisaluokta. Jokkmokk Sami with pack reindeer on their way to the summer pastures at Vastenjaure. Photographer: Ernst Manker/Nordiska museet*



*Sami's move on the "märkan's decauville track" in 1949. Woman pushes at cart with packning while boy stands on the side with a stick in his hand. Stora Sjöfallet at the Nordiska museet's Lappmark survey. Photo: Ernst Manker/Nordiska museet.*

## Problems along national borders

For Sami, national borders have not been so important. Reindeer husbandry has been carried out in Scandinavia since time immemorial, and on *Nordkalotten* (the Cap of the North, the area above the Arctic Circle) and the advent of national borders did not change that. If the tax burden became too high in Sweden, Sami could settle in Norway for a while. There are cross-border issues and historical decisions taken by other countries that have affected the situation of the Sami in Sweden, both in the short and long term.

When the Swedish-Norwegian national borders were drawn up in the mid-18th century, the Swedish Sami were confirmed the right to reindeer grazing in Norway through the *Lappkodicillen* (the Lapp Codicil of 1751). The Lapp Codicil was an addition to the 30-paragraph border treaty that gave Sami the right to partially choose citizenship, full neutrality during war, full right to use land and water in the other country for a small fee and the right to reindeer grazing. The Sami had the right to move freely across the border. At the time, Finland belonged to Sweden and Norway to Denmark. In 1809, Finland became grand duchy under Russia. In 1814, Norway was dissolved from Denmark and forced into a union with Sweden. In 1852, Russia closed the border between Norway and Finland, which later led to the forced displacement of Sami in Sweden. In 1889, the border between Sweden and Finland was closed. In 1905, the Union was dissolved between Norway and Sweden. Since then, two reindeer grazing conventions between Sweden and Norway have been entered into, 1919 and 1972, both of which have significantly restricted the reindeer grazing rights of Swedish Sami on the Norwegian side.

### *Reindeer grazing conventions*

In 1843, Norway called for the appointment of a commission with the task of evaluating the Lapp Codicil and proposing restrictions and liability. The negative Norwegian attitude was linked to agricultural colonization and racist and colonialist views. Norway wanted to limit reindeer herding Swedish Sami their reindeer grazing rights and to implement strict control and compensation provisions. The commission agreed that the rights of the codicil were to be restricted, but in practice it took a long time for the new provisions to be implemented. In 1883 came *Felleskapsloven* ("community law") which became a law in Norway, but a regulation in Sweden. Then the Lapp Codicil was set aside, but not repealed. The first reindeer grazing convention between Sweden and Norway was entered into in 1919. At that time, the Swedish Sami grazing rights in Norway were severely restricted. The 1972 Reindeer Grazing Convention imposed further restrictions. It was to be valid for 30 years, but since Sweden and Norway could not agree, it was extended for a few years. The Norwegian side wanted even more restrictions on the right of Swedish Sami reindeer to graze in Norway, which Sweden did not agree to. Since 2005, Sweden has maintained that the Lapp Codicil from 1751 will remain in force until a new reindeer husbandry convention has entered into force. Norway has instead passed a new law on the basis of the previous convention. This still causes constant conflict today. Both Saarivuoma and Talma samebys have been involved in legal disputes against the Norwegian State and the matter has not been resolved.



## *Border closings*

The border closure between Norway and Finland in 1852 meant that Norwegian Sami were forbidden from moving to their winter pastures in Finland. Since Sami through the Lapp Codicil had the right to change their State affiliation, several Sami families from Kautokeino in Norway chose to move to Swedish Karesuando with their reindeer herds to become Swedish subjects and thus continue to use their winter pastures in Finland. The Finnish authorities then asked the Russian Government to block the border to Sweden. In 1889, Russia closed the Finnish border to Swedish Sami. The result was too many reindeer on the winter pastures in northernmost Sweden and too many reindeer at summer pastures in Troms in Northern Norway. Cross-border reindeer grazing became one of the most difficult issues in the context of the dissolution of the Union in 1905. Norway called for a reduction in the number of reindeer. The Reindeer Grazing Convention 1919 was felt heavily by reindeer herders in northern Norrbotten, but the Sami in Västerbotten also lost large grazing areas on the Norwegian side and the Sami in Jämtland, which had been entitled to border grazing since 1883, lost it almost completely.<sup>27</sup>

## *Forced displacement of Northern Sami*

Since the pastures in northernmost Sweden were not enough for all reindeer, the Lapp bailiffs in Norrbotten County began to organize movements of Northern Sami reindeer herding families to southern areas. During the 1920s and until 1937, nearly 80 Sami families were transferred to other areas along the mountain range. There is not much research into how the forced displacements took place. For the displaced, it was often a trauma that was not talked about much, it was just to put up with what the authorities decided. They could not check what bailiffs and others wrote in Swedish anyways. According to history teacher Johannes Marainen, who has researched the forced displacements and whose ancestors were displaced, several steps were presented.<sup>28</sup> The first step was to move voluntarily with all their reindeer to another sameby. The second step was to be referred to a particular sameby with all their reindeer. The third step was to be referred to a particular sameby but not with all reindeer, some would be forcibly slaughtered. The fourth step was forced slaughter and having to pay for the transfer yourself. According to the Lapp bailiffs, the movements were voluntary, but according to Johannes Marainen, the fact that the displaced Northern Sami did not adapt their language to the new area and did not change their Northern Sami *koltar* (traditional Sami costume) says otherwise, according to Johannes Marainen. In marriage and voluntary change of residence, they usually adapted to the new area, learned the language and changed clothes, but the displaced did not.

The forced displacement is a trauma that the Sami know about but rarely talk about. Why haven't people talked about it more? Johannes Marainen says: "If you start asking Sami that are about the same age as me what it was like at school, then a lot of people don't want to talk about it and if they tell me, it's often memories that are painful. When I think about school, it's like poking a wound that I just want to forget. I think they thought it would be better to accept

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<sup>27</sup>Time begins again, Patrik Lantto (2000), p. 131

<sup>28</sup>Notes from the lecture by Johannes Marainen in Vålådalen on 23 May 2011 in connection with the Sami Parliament's plenary session.

the situation. You don't want to hurt others. We're so afraid of things that hurt. Emotions have been hidden."<sup>29</sup>

Johannes Marainen goes on to say that those who moved were told that there was a place for them, and to those who lived there, the Lapp bailiffs said that the Northern Sami were forced to move there because there was no room where they came from. After the famine years, pastures had become empty. In some areas, reindeer had diseases and people had died in the Spanish flu. The number of reindeer decreased, and some had temporarily stopped reindeer husbandry. But after the forced displacements, they didn't have a place to come back to. Marainen notes: "This story has only losers on both sides. Those who were forcibly displaced, but also Sami who had temporarily left reindeer herding."<sup>30</sup>

Many Sami mention in their survey responses that forced displacement must be examined by the truth commission. More knowledge is needed about the causes, the motives behind the displacements, how the displacements were carried out and what their consequences were for Sami community, for families and individuals.

*An inherited feeling from his family from the forced displacement, of being second-class Sami. A child's legacy of the feeling of forced displacement can be processed much later, when the child has grown up. Then comes the realization: "Well, that's why Grandfather spoke Finnish and Norwegian!" Grandpa never wanted to tell you anything but that it was beautiful on "öya" (a land area in Trondheim, Norway). It was much better on "öya". A twinkle in the eye and grandfather went out. The realization when the child was threatened in the forest, to be knocked down, as if it is a right to beat a child belonging to the displaced family.*

*Redress to all descendants of displaced Sami families from the summer grazing in Troms and winter grazing in the Karesuando area. All documents and letters in the matter must be compiled in a document/book. Document forgery of Swedish Lapp bailiffs, written in Swedish with false signatures from those affected that the move took place voluntarily. The Swedish Government's approval of the matter. We descendants have inherited a silent grief and injustice committed against our parents/ancestors, and demand that it be brought to light, and recognized by the Swedish and Norwegian authorities.*

*The displacement has contributed to the rootlessness of those who moved, especially in the children, and also the generations after. Families were divided.*

*The silence, the sadness, sometimes the trauma have crushed many of the displaced, leaving open wounds and questions to the next generation without any answers. For my part, I have "lost" half of my relatives as I have not been able to get to know them in a natural way. It's inexcusable of the authorities the way they treated us. My father's family was on the "run" for many years from Saarivuoma to Talma and then for a full 4 years in Mellanbyn to finally reach Granbyn. How secure was my father's childhood? Because it continued at the age of 10 with bullying in the new foreign nomadic school. I think about this with great sadness in my heart.*

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Johannes Marainen, Elin Anna Labba in Sami people 2019-11-07, <https://samefolket.se/johannes-marainen-de-har-lurat-oss/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://samefolket.se/johannes-marainen-de-har-lurat-oss/>

## *Consequences of forced displacements*

The displacements had major consequences in the Sami community, both for the Sami families who were forced to leave their friends, relatives and well-known lands to start over elsewhere, and for the Sami who lived in the receiving areas. Language difficulties, competition for the land and different ways of reindeer husbandry created problems. Receiving Sami had rarely been asked if they wanted to receive new reindeer herding families. Some areas were already under severe pressure from colonization. These movements also affected the land use of surrounding forest samebys. Even today, there are major conflicts in Västerbotten, in particular due to the forced displacement, while in other areas it has worked better over time.

A number of informants believe that the truth commission must examine how the State and County Administrative Board in Västerbotten created a situation in the Vapsten sameby in the Tärnaby area where Northern Sami have been pitted against Southern Sami. They wonder how the Southern Sami there could lose the opportunity to use their rights to their traditional lands and practice their Southern Sami culture. It is not the Sami who caused the situation, but the State (or rather the nations). At a structural level, the State can continue to rule by division. At the group level, Sami are alienated from feeling connected to other Sami. On an individual level, people on both sides are driven into a great amount of stress and pressured life situation and finances, known factors for developing mental illness.

*The Southern Sami in Tärna have fallen into a phenomenon known as victim blaming. It is when the people around the victim believe that the victim of a crime has done something himself to cause the situation. It is a major problem when Sami seek redress for the historical trauma they still live in, and other Sami perceive this as a threat.*

*I have lived a Sami life in Tärna and Vapsten, but due to the current situation, our family has not practiced reindeer husbandry. It is family tragedies that the Truth Commission MUST take seriously and the State correct! Because it is not just a question of the right to reindeer husbandry. It's about lives stolen and a denial of the most important thing in humanity for so many generations. It's a disgrace! We suffer every day because of this. Every day. Still!*

*I am the original Sami of Vapsten and have seen an entire generation lost through the forced displacements carried out by the State in an abusive and inexcusable way. No one was allowed to move to my village, but with the extended arms of the State, Lapp bailiffs and county administrative boards, moving in was justified on the grounds that the reindeer husbandry we carried out was poor and not rational. The violations and abuses of our reindeer husbandry methods, traditions, culture, language, cultural heritage and living spaces, carried out by the State and, above all, the county administrative board, hit hard and led me today, together with others, to fight in court to regain rights stolen and the land occupied by other Sami with the help of the State.*

### *Other forced displacements*

Other types of forced displacement are also mentioned in the survey material, such as the expulsion of Sami from Bergslagen and Dalarna in the 1800s<sup>31</sup> and forced displacement of Sami in southern Sami territory. For example, Sami in Jämtland lost their reindeer grazing land on the Norwegian side during the dissolution of the Union in 1905 and the Lapp bailiffs then organized a relocation where families were divided. Forced displacement due to hydropower expansion is mentioned on page 30.

*Forced displacement from Idre to Glen, Oviken. Lost winter pastures in the 19th century for Skäckerfjäll, Kall, at Femunden in Norway and summer grazing land for Ruvhten Sijte at Femunden and Vigelfället. Swedish names have displaced the Sami for people, towns and areas. Isolated farming villages were given access roads while the sameby of Ruvhten Sijte was forced to move the entire sameby to newly built houses in a new village along the road.*

### *Northern Finland*

Another cross-border problem concerns the fact that Finland was part of Sweden for over 600 years. In the 17th century, Kemi Lappmark covered the inland of northern Finland down to Kuusamo. The area was originally populated by Forest Sami, but the migration of Finns and Kareles caused the Sami to be assimilated or pushed further north. Sweden, Denmark and Russia have claimed tax collection rights in northern Finland. In Finland, the community, culture, language, religion and livelihoods of Forest Sami and Hunting and Fishing Sami have been destroyed by authorities in several countries. According to one informant, four samebys have been completely lost and at least three Sami dialects have largely disappeared during the time when Sweden's laws, the Swedish Church and the Swedish Crown governed in northern and eastern Finland.

*The abuses of the Swedish State have been done by marginalizing non-reindeer-owning Sami in both Sweden and Finland. They are shut off from their ancient inherited lands and water, as well as in Sweden outside the current samebys' regulations. In Finland, this group is largely without rights. In both countries, forest, hunting and fishing Sami have been forcibly assimilated into the majority population. In Sweden, this group is excluded from the Sami communities with "catch 22" and in Finland this group does not even have the right to vote to the Sami Parliament.*

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<sup>31</sup> <https://southsaamihistory.wordpress.com/2015/06/05/uti-dalarna-klackta-och-borna-om-etnisk-rensning-och-sockenlappssystemets-borjan/>

## Education policies

In Canada, boarding schools have been a major issue addressed by the Truth Commission. In Sweden, the issue is not just about the nomad schools and boarding schools, but about the entire education system for Sami people right into our day; the mission schools, the nomad schools, the public school, the primary school, the Sami school, the Sami integration and native tongue teaching are mentioned in our material.

Until the end of the 19th century, there was no uniform view of the teaching of Sami children. Individual efforts were made in different areas by private individuals or missionary organizations. The aim was often good from the start, to give Sami the intellectual tools to defend their lands and culture. More or less successful school forms succeeded each other until around 1880 when the Lapp school system began to resemble the non-Sami public school.

### *The nomad school*

It was the representatives of the Church who initiated the nomad school. The prominent figures on the Committee for Nomad Teaching were the Vicar of Karesuando Vitalis Karnell, Assistant Vicar Georg Bergfors of Vittangi and Bishop Olof Bergqvist of Luleå. They were strongly influenced by the hierarchical thinking rooted in cultural Darwinism. The result was the nomad school reform adopted by parliament in 1913. Their overarching aim of the reform was to protect the reindeer herding Mountain Sami from civilization so that they would survive as a people. The nomad school was introduced in Jämtland and Västerbotten in 1917 and the following year in Norrbotten. It was only for the reindeer herding mountain Sami children, not even reindeer herding Forest Sami children were to attend the nomad school, even if there were some who did it anyway and testify that they always knew they were at the bottom of the scale.

The Nomad School Reform had major consequences in the Sami community and has contributed to today's divisions.<sup>32</sup> The fact that the school form was substandard and discriminatory was clear to the Sami very early on.<sup>33</sup> The Sami children would live in and go to school in huts so as not to be "made Swedish". The school language was Swedish and many people tell of punishments if they spoke any other language. Sami-speaking teachers were not allowed to teach in their own areas. Sami language did not become a school subject until 1962, and then only Northern Sami. Native language teaching in Southern Sami was not offered until 1977. Despite protests from the side of the Sami, the nomad school for reindeer herder children remained in practice until 1962, although the huts disappeared and school homes were gradually introduced in the 1940s and 1950s. After 1962, it was said that the nomad school was for all Sami children, but this was not put into practice until much later. Today, the school form is called Sami School and includes preschool to grade six. Sami school is a State school form with a Sami profile, follows the curriculum for primary school and attracts children from different Sami backgrounds.

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/filer/29%20Oscarsson.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> The issue is discussed during the first Sami country meeting on the Swedish side in 1918: <https://www.sametinget.se/119174>



*Fjällgren teaches Sami children in school hut, Stora Axhögen, Härjedalen, 1930. Photograph: C.G. Rosenberg /Nordi*

*Childhood from the year you started school and my youth is a lost time, it has left a big deep hole in my soul. Both during the time at the nomad school and the Sami secondary school with its boarding activities, you felt alienation, you were completely at the mercy of them. At the boarding school it was important to be obedient and do as the staff said, they had incredible control of the children, there was a lot of punishment, both mental and physical. The children were treated like a flock and not as individuals with their own special needs.*

*I had close relatives who weren't even allowed to go to nomad school. Even if you could read Sami, it was only Northern Sami, not Southern Sami, which was my language.*

*The education system has been part of de-enacting the Sami language, identity and self-esteem and repressing them. It's hard as an adult to acquire the written language and grammar when you weren't taught Sami as a child, even though I went to nomad school.*

*It hasn't been easy going to nomad school. We were only allowed to come home during the holidays. We were not taught handicrafts and the Ume Sami language disappeared very early.*

*The nomad school forced us to leave our culture and language behind, we became "naked", who am I when nothing from my culture counts, is good enough?*

*I belong to the generation that has lost almost all the Southern Sami language despite having spent 10 years in nomad school and Sami secondary school. When you were young you didn't realize what you'd lost - but it's a really big loss for me. At school, we were taught almost nothing about Sami life. A lot was missed because you could not participate fully in your Sami family with the use of reindeer meat, skins and much more. I was a guest who came home for Christmas and for the summer!*

*During the years at the boarding school, we children were formed by hierarchical group processes that were often characterized by the mentality "do you think you are something", "stay in your place". For*

*many, this led to a lack of self-confidence, a sense of inferiority, increasing exclusion.... Many of us had a longing for the easy-going community that all children seek. Out in society, we often heard swear words about "Lapps," just as when we moved on from the nomad school to other educational institutions, which meant that we often avoided revealing our ethnicity.*

*When the nomad school inspector came to the school, the traditional costume had to be used and the Swedish flag had to be raised. Every two weeks, the Sami children walked through the community dressed in their traditional costumes to church. Children in the community stood and shouted "Lapp, Lapp, Lapp." The children went home three times a school year; Christmas, Easter and summer holidays. Without the permanent connection to Sami everyday life and without proximity to their family. An insight that comes in adulthood.*



*Schoolboys in nomad school are being tucked away by teacher Ingrid Gaup. Jukkasjärvi, Norrbotten. Photo: Borg Mesch/Nordiska museet*

### *Public school*

If the nomad school seemed segregating for reindeer herding mountain Sami children, the public school seemed assimilating to the other Sami. The Swedish assimilation policy, or *Swedification*, also affected Sami-speaking Sami children (in addition to the Meänkieli-speaking children in the Torne Valley). Sami children were also placed in the so-called work houses. In public school it was forbidden to speak anything other than Swedish, and violations of language were severely punished, depending on the teacher's or housekeeper's own ideas. Many older Sami have memories of abuse and shame at school. Because of these experiences, in the 1960s and 1970s there were many Sami parents who did not speak Sami with their children. Researchers' ideas about the risk of "semi-lingualism" and the parents' negative experiences of being Sami-speaking when they started in Swedish school made them want to spare their children that shame. Their descendants have thus lost their language, and many are now ashamed instead of not being able to speak Sami 'even though they should be able to'.

*Cousins were separated when Sami children without reindeer were going to the village school while Sami children with reindeer were going to the nomad school. The nomad school reform that cut through Sami community where half would go to nomad school and half in ordinary public school caused a lot of*

*bitterness and great sadness. Sami could become more anti-Sami than the majority population of pure self-preservation. You thought you were making a choice, but you really had no choice. When my mother was a child in the 1940s, children from Vittangi forest sameby were not allowed to attend the nomad school in Lannavaara with other Sami children. It created conflict and alienation. She lost the right to use her language and as a human she was disparaged in the village school.*

*What effects on language, identity, culture, self-esteem, dignity did it have when dividing the Sami children so that some were going to the nomad school and some to the public school? How do we see the effects of this today? Those who went to nomad school were raised to understand that they were "real Lapps" and their relatives who went to public school were told they were Swedes. In elementary school and later primary school, it was of course completely out of the question to speak Sami.*

*We should also look at the workhouses and the church's involvement in them. In Jokkmokk, it was the vicar who had the ultimate responsibility. Here most things have happened, bullying, beatings and humiliations.*

### *Middle school and High school*

The possibilities for native language teaching are addressed in several conversations. Although the law today gives Sami the right to learn their language, it is in practice very difficult for many schools to organize Sami teaching, partly due to the teacher shortage. The fact that schools do not make it easier for young Sami to study Sami in middle school and high school and that teacher training does not cover the subject of Sami are themes that Sami address in their annual progress reports on the Sami languages. As a result, of few high school students having grades in Sami (0.2 per mille of an annual class in 2018),<sup>34</sup> there is a minimal recruitment base for teacher training and higher education in the Sami language.

The fact that there is a difference between Sami and Sami is still noticeable today in the Swedish primary school, according to some young informants who feel that Sami youths from reindeer herding families are treated differently, for example, when it comes to leave or the possibility of making knives and traditional costumes in the craft lessons. Such things provoke anger and sow division between Sami youth to this day while the teachers are probably completely unaware of it.

*The division of Sami children was repeated in the 1990s with Sami integration. I wasn't allowed to attend Sami integration classes in middle school because we didn't speak Sami at home.*

*I was born in 1979. When I wanted to study Sami in primary school, it was said that at least five students were needed for the school to arrange teaching. When we got together into a group of even more than five students, the school said there was no teacher. My father got a teacher to who was willing, but we still weren't allowed to study Sami. I feel betrayed by the school, I lost so many years.*

*You still read more about Indians than Sami in Swedish schools. Greater ignorance in southern Sweden, some still do not even know that the Sami are Sweden's indigenous people.*

*The language issue is the most important. In my opinion, it has been deferred and delayed in Sweden*

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<sup>34</sup> Sami Parliament's Progress Report on the Sami Languages 2019, p. 43.



*since the 1960s, when I myself was subjected to Sami teaching without learning much. (During the same time, I learned reasonably good English and understandable German and French.) Well, what about now? I sometimes work at school and try to speak to the students who study North Sami or Ume Sami. How's it going? I usually ask simple questions about how they are feeling or about the weather, but are often met with uncomprehending glances. Has nothing happened since I went to school?*

*The Truth Commission must highlight how Sami policy has affected Sami children's upbringing and schooling, and their opportunities to learn Sami languages.*



*Sorsele Sami in Ammarnäs in 1871. Photographer: Lotten von Düben/Nordiska museet.*



*Jon Jonsson Fjällgren and his wife Kristina Persdotter in connection with the move from Jämtland to Idre at the beginning of the 20th century. The family later moved to Anådalen in today's Mittådalen sameby. Photo: Private.*

## Loss of language, culture and identity

The Swedification process, the consequences of language loss, loss of identity and the difficulties in regaining one's language as an adult are evident both in the survey material and in the conversations. The Swedification process is an important issue. Many people tell of different episodes from school where their own language was not considered important and eventually fell into oblivion. The loss of language has many consequences. When you take language away from someone, a part of their identity, the ability to express one's feelings, spirituality, belonging, history, cultural heritage and view of the world is lost. A language carries a lot of cultural knowledge that disappears completely as old words and concepts are no longer used. Being deprived of your language means disturbing the sense of context, belonging and trust. Taking children out of their context is an attack not only on language, but on family, social context and culture.<sup>35</sup> It is not just about the children who were forced to leave home for long periods of time, but also about the parents and grandparents who remained.

At school, the Sami names became more Swedish-like. Sami who lost their reindeer were forced to change to Swedish-sounding surnames in order to take up employment and support their families. Some informants talk about decisions in villages and village schools where it was decided to use only Swedish even though the villages were completely Sami from the beginning. The "Swedification" meant that the children could not talk to their elderly relatives. It caused shame and a sense of loss of history. Sami can experience it as having been robbed of their life, of everything they should have known, such as handicrafts, language and stories.

The Sami have to live with the consequences of Swedification still today. Parents testify that they still must fight for their children to be taught Sami, for the right to their language and culture – despite all the conventions and laws that are supposed to guarantee this.

*In Arvidsjaur, people have been deprived of their language and identity - that you are not good enough as you are. Sami is not spoken in public anywhere today. The government's language policy has done this. The municipality continues to make the Sami invisible. For example, when you publish job advertisements where descriptions of the business community contain everything but the Sami business community. There is no mention of reindeer husbandry, slaughterhouses or processing companies in Arvidsjaur, even though Sweden's largest reindeer butchery is located here.*

*In public school, the issue was so infected, and you were not allowed to speak Sami during breaks, which meant that you started to feel ashamed, felt disparaged and had poor self-confidence.*

*The South Sami have been hard-pressed by the State for the language, belonging and all sorts of things. My whole family lost everything. The government must bear the costs of recovering this; language, names, land, handicraft material – there are many of us who are excluded from the sameby.*

*We were not allowed to use the language, not in the village school and not in the nomad school and from the beginning we were not allowed to have Sami handicrafts either in the nomad school in Tärnaby.*

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<sup>35</sup> Chief Wilton Littlechild, who himself was taken from his family to a boarding school, describes the abuse this way: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAAnFaKQ2uM&feature=youtu.be>

*I remember when I was going to sew my first Lapp costume. Then my mother was very happy and satisfied and said: Finally, we get to be Sami too! So unfortunate that our identity was questioned, you didn't know what you were. Am I Sami? Are my children and grandchildren Sami?*

*It's sad to know that I'm Sami, but I don't feel like I'm Sami because I can't be Sami. I don't have what a typical Sami should have, or can get.*



*Sami boy with goat in Lapland around the turn of the 20th century. Probably motif by John Hertzberg on a trip around Sweden. Photo: Helmer Bäckström Archive/Tekniska museet.*



*Ice fishing. Andreas Labba pulls up nets that he put under the ice on the Kaitum River, 1947. Photo: Jan-Erik Anderbjörk/Nordiska museet.*

## Racial biology, racism and structural discrimination

Sweden's view of the Sami has changed from the goodwill of the 17th century expressed in the *Lappmarksplakatet* (1673, 1695)(Lappmark Proclamation) and the borderline treaty with Norway in 1751 (Lapp Codicil) to the incipient racism of the 19th century. At the same time, even if colonization was encouraged, the Sami lands and livelihoods would be protected. Then there was a shift in the view of the Sami.

Nationalism arose in Europe in the 18th century and led in the 19th century to the creation of nation states as an ideal; "one country, one people." From the mid-19th century, Swedish state politics was based on the "best interests of the nation state". During this period, ideas of "the noble savage" were also spread, a romantic conception of natural peoples outside civilization who were considered to have lived without war and greed. In Sweden, the policy towards Sami people called "Lapp shall remain Lapp" policy was drawn up. The reindeer herding mountain Sami were considered to be least affected by civilization and surrounding cultures and thus "unspoiled". Although the common view was that nomad culture was doomed, many Swedish rulers had an exotic view of the Sami reindeer husbandry culture and a paternalistic approach; the 'genuine' Sami would be preserved for as long as possible and therefore be isolated. The other Sami would be assimilated. The Lapp administration and nomad schools came to institutionalize the politically established guideline that had elements of both cultural-Darwinism and racism. Other examples include the abduction of Sami sacrificial offerings and Sami remains, the skull measurements of racial biologists and Lapp bailiffs that made decisions over the heads of the Sami. But the racist mindsets still haunts. They remain in structures and ideas and are noticeable, for example, when children are not allowed to use their language in preschool/school, when museums do not want to return remains or cultural heritage items, when there is a lack of information about national minority languages, that schools schedule language teaching so that pupils have to choose between modern languages or Sami or opt out of Sami because it becomes too onerous; inadequate Sami content in curricula, that teacher training is not adapted for Sami, that Sami researchers are not considered impartial, that the state's lawyers used the word "Lapps" during the milestone Girjas case<sup>36</sup>, that there are no channels of information on the laws and regulations in force in the reindeer herding area, that the Minister of Rural Affairs invites so many representatives to deliberations on the review of reindeer herding law that the Sami end up in the minority; that a consultation arrangement with Sami is seen as a threat, that the Sami and the Sami Parliament are reduced by limiting funds for democratic work, that samebys do not receive full compensation for predatory damage, and more.

The fact that poor, deficient and misinformation about Sami and Sami living conditions contributes to the racism and structural discrimination that exists today is an issue that engages many. Therefore, several proposals for improved and compulsory teaching on Sami and Sami history both in schools and for public authorities also came in the survey responses.

*I want the nude photographs and other pictures of my father and mother and other relatives to be burned. These are in Uppsala. Anyone can look at these pictures. My mother and my father would never*

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.sametinget.se/141270>

*have given their permission for others to see these pictures. Nor have they ever given their permission to be photographed. A brutal assault.*

*The Swedish government humiliated through the Racial Biology Institute, Sami, Romani, Jews and other ethnic groups from the 1920s onwards. To this day, these ideas are spread by parties represented in the Riksdag.*

*It became easier to steal Sami land when racial biology mindsets gained a foothold in Sweden. Sami were not suitable for owning land.*

*Reindeer marks that have been designed and followed a family for generations through inheritance, the State has, through the county administrative board, taken the right to seize and destroy. Historical violations and abuses of reindeer husbandry methods, traditions, culture, language, cultural heritage and living spaces. Segregation and devaluation of different Sami groups based on racism.*

*The racial biologists called us crosses and half-Lapps... The image of what a true Sami is, "those of us who have high cheekbones are genuine Sami", even gender stereotypes, the state has created a division between women – men, as well as color and appearance.*

*It's very difficult to delve into this about racial biology – how are we going to get through this in a empowering way? It is also important to include this with lateral violence - to pick on each other, Sami attack other Sami.<sup>37</sup>*

*My father was not a nomad, and went to school with the Swedish children, he took off his Sami clothes and hid them under a stone because he was always bullied. He had the identity with the Sami children but had to go to Swedish school where the Sami children were persecuted. 85% of Tärnaby are Sami, it's sad. It was the racial biology mindset. Some did not receive adequate education in the nomad school. Closer to Sorsele, there was this idea that if you were 25% Lapp you had a slightly higher status but if you were fully Sami it was a shame (low status). You counted each other's percentages. The whole discussion is completely absurd, but it stems from racial biology. In the church books, the ethnicity of 'Lapp' is written and it is also under the box "disability".*

*That we've been categorized as idiots or stupid, it is always the government that sits with the pen, if you establish a Sami institution, it is not obvious that we ourselves should govern it since we are considered as having a conflict of interest. That this image from the skull measurements, it's etched the mind of even of civilized educated people... All research is based on Swedish perspectives, not Sami perspectives. Swedish institutions are seen as impartial but Sami institutions are considered to be bias!?*

*We Sami in the south are still talking about the sign at the dance outside the dance hall in Bruksvallarna in the 1970s in connection with the introduction of snowmobile bans for a certain period of time. The text read: Sami are not welcome.*

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<sup>37</sup> Intragroup conflicts are common in groups that are subjected to oppression and discrimination, this is called lateral or horizontal violence. Lateral violence means that anger and frustration that is formed within the oppressed group due to powerlessness are directed at one's own group, instead of directed at the oppressor.

*Just look at the county administrative board's land-lease map of Kiruna municipality. Only those who live in "samebys" who do not own their land, cannot sell their land or get a mortgage to build a house on that land – an obvious sign of the racism that has been and still exists.*

*To this day, the view persists of Sami that we are beneficiaries, and that reindeer herding would not survive without it: The Sami do not want to work but live on benefits, compared to people who live on welfare: "The Sami drive their reindeer out on the road on purpose to get subsidies".*

*Sweden must come to terms with its racist history and ideology, so that today they become aware that they still pursue a structurally racist policy towards indigenous Sami through current legislation. The invisibility of Sami in Swedish history and a lack of teaching in schools mean that people know so little about Sami.*

*People see you as a blue-clad Santa-like figure who lives in a tent somewhere on a mountain - as if you were a fairytale figure and think it seems so cozy. They have no understanding of how much the government has actively opposed the continued existence of Sami culture.*

*How the Swedish government has systematically discriminated against and disadvantaged Sami people, for example by denying Sami people home loans until the 1960s. This has put the Sami people in a worse position than the majority population.*

*I want to see zero tolerance of the discrimination against Sami and the Sami language, to this day Sami have to suffer discrimination and racism every day of their lives for their culture and language.*

*Sweden is a pioneer in terms of silence, cover-up, whitewashing, falsification and disinterest. The guiding star has been concepts such as 'speaking is silver, silence is gold' and 'a Swede keeps his mouth shut' (Sv: "en svensk tiger").*



*Text on the back of the photograph: "Lapp meeting in Jukkasjärvi 1905. Hjalmar Lundbohm predominates. Photo: Borg Mesch/Nordiska museet"*

## 5. Other truth commissions in Scandinavia

### Norway: Commission to investigate Norwegianisation policy and injustice to Sami, Kvens and Norwegian Finns

The Norwegian authorities have, just like their Swedish counterparts, in periods up until the end of the 1900s, carried out a policy against Sami, Kvens /Norwegian Finns that has had serious negative consequences for their culture, language, identity and living conditions. Over time, a desire has emerged for the establishment of a public commission to review the policy of 'Norwegianisation' and its effects, including from the Sami Parliament in Norway and Sami organizations. Before the Commission was appointed, the Sami Parliament held meetings in several places and reported the results to Stortinget (Norwegian parliament). On 20 June 2017, Stortinget decided to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which also included Kvens/Norwegian Finns, and on 19 May 2019 Forest Finns were incorporated into the mandate.<sup>38</sup> The Commission shall complete its work before 1 September 2022 and submit the report to the Storting presidium. *Sekretariatet for Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjonen* (the Secretariat of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) is located at the Norwegian Arctic University in Tromsø.

Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjonen has 12 members and is led by Dagfinn Høybråten.<sup>39</sup> The Members of the Commission represent only themselves and are appointed by Stortinget. Members of the Commission hold working meetings, open public meetings whenever possible and engage in information gathering. The methods used are:

- Existing research
- Archive auditing
- Interviews
- Ordering investigations from experts
- Collection/reception of materials

All collected material is archived with *Arkiverket* where Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjonen has its own archive. A separate law has been created for this purpose and all employees have 100 years of professional secrecy. Informants can choose to remain anonymous if they so wish.

#### *Commission*

The review aims to lay a foundation for the recognition of the experiences of Sami, Kvens/ Norwegian Finns in connection with the Norwegian government's policy, and the consequences these experiences have had on them as groups and individuals.

The mandate describes three missions:

1. A historical survey describing the policies of the Norwegian authorities and the practices against Sami and Kvens/Norwegian Finns both locally, regionally and nationally.

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Hva-skjer-pa-Stortinget/Nyhetsarkiv/Hva-skjer-nyheter/2017-2018/sannhets-og-forsoningskommisjonen/>

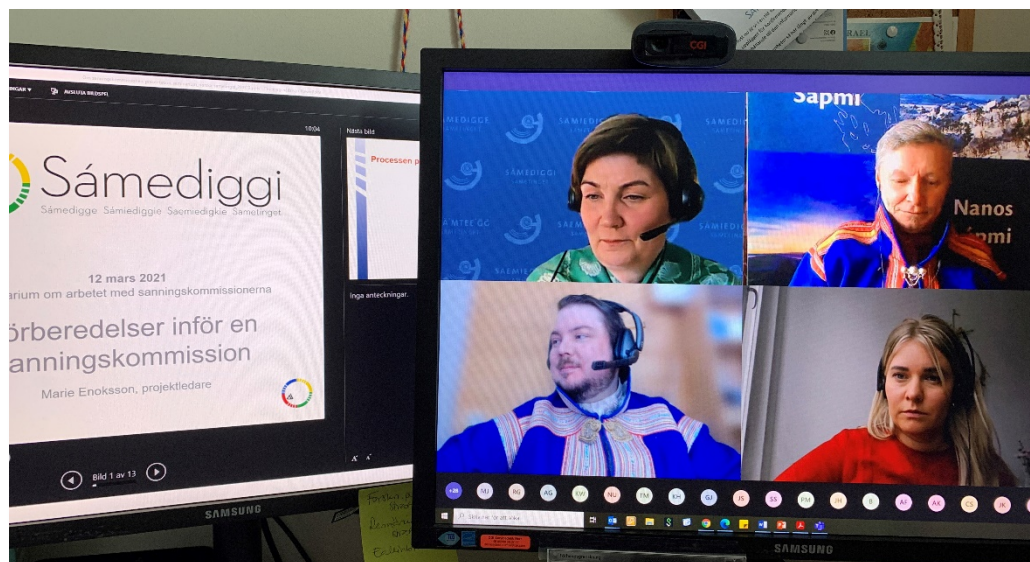
<sup>39</sup> Read more: <https://uit.no/kommisjonen/medlemmer>

2. A study of the consequences of the Norwegianisation policy. The Commission will study how the Norwegianisation policy has influenced the majority population's views on Sami, Kvens/Norwegian Finns and the importance of the Norwegianisation to date.
3. Proposals for measures contributing to further reconciliation.

The time span chosen for the study is from the year 1800 to today. The timing is chosen on the basis that you can then see the first traces of the Norwegianisation policy. The Commission studies both the ideology behind school policy, religious, academic and social institutions and the linguistic, cultural, material, social, health and identity implications of the policies implemented at local, regional and national level.

### *Crisis and support talks*

Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjonen cooperates with SANKS (Sami national competence service - mental health care and addiction, at Finnmarkssykehuset in Finnmark, Norway). SANKS offers specialist psychiatric care services and provides culturally competent medical advice to the Commission in connection with their work. There is a call line that is open 8:30-15:30 during weekdays and during events. SANKS offers crisis and support talks about experiences related to Norwegianisation and abuse. SANKS will transfer the people who need it to the respective municipality or to specialist care. 2.5 posts have been allocated to the work through SANKS. SANKS will, as far as possible, accompany the Commission's events and detect needs. Information about the offer is given in connection with the meetings.



*Digital seminar on the work with the Truth Commissions in Norway, Sweden and Finland, organized by the Norwegian Sami Parliament on 12 March 2021.*



## Finland: Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Sami

The work process on the Finnish side is somewhat different from Norway and Sweden. In 2017, the Finnish Sami Parliament's Board of Directors and the Prime Minister agreed that a process of truth and reconciliation would begin. For the government, the Prime Minister's Office, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, is responsible for the preparation of the truth and reconciliation process. The process has been prepared in dialogue with the Sami Parliament and the Skolt Sameby committee. In February 2018, a seminar was held on international experience with truth and reconciliation commissions. In May–June 2018, several consultation meetings were carried out in the Sami community area and in cities where there is a Sami association. About 300 people took part in the meetings. The consultation report was published in November 2018.<sup>40</sup>

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is expected to start work in 2021. Their work is expected to take two years.

### *Commission*

The purpose of the truth and reconciliation process is to identify and assess discrimination both in the past and today, including the State's assimilation policy, and violations of Sami rights, to investigate their impact on the Sami and their community today, and to present proposed means of promoting contact between both the Sami and the Finnish State, as well as between the Sami. Through the process of truth and reconciliation, awareness of the Sami as the indigenous peoples of Finland will increase. The Commission shall be autonomous and independent in its work.<sup>41</sup>

The aim of the Commission's work is to compile and make visible the Sami's experiences of the actions and consequences of the Finnish State and various authorities for the Sami as an indigenous people and individuals. As a result of the truth and reconciliation process, the Finnish State shall bear its responsibilities and, together with the Sami Parliament, the Skolt Sameby committee and other Sami actors, promote the fulfilment of Sami rights in Finland. A common understanding of discrimination both in the past and today, including the State's assimilation policy, and on violations of Sami rights is expected to create a basis for reconciliation between the Sami and the State.

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<sup>40</sup> <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/161165>

<sup>41</sup> [Truth and Reconciliation Commission Concerning the Sámi People - Prime Minister's Office \(vnk.fi\)](#)

## Sweden: Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaisiens

On 19 March 2020, the Government decided on a truth and reconciliation commission to investigate violations and abuses of Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaisiens as a result of the 19th and 20th centuries' assimilation policies. This decision was preceded by a preliminary study called *"Then I was like a prisoner" – The state's abuse of Tornedalians and Meänkieli speakers during the 19th and 20th centuries* <sup>42</sup> written by Curt Persson and financed by the Ministry of Culture. On 11 June 2020, the Government appointed seven members to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The decision was taken after dialogue with *Svenska Tornedalingars Riksförbund – Tornionlaaksolaiset (STR-T)* (The Swedish Tornedalians National Association), and the youth organization Met Nuoret.

The Commission's mission is to promote the visibility of the historical experience of the minority, to provide collective redress to those affected, and to promote reconciliation to prevent something like this from never happening again. The Commission shall, among others:

- identify and review assimilation policies and their impact on the minority, minority groups and individuals
- spread information to increase knowledge about the minority and its historical experience
- propose continued efforts to contribute to redress and promote reconciliation

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission started its work in October 2020 when the members of the Commission travelled around Tornedalen, to listen to people's stories. Before the second wave of pandemic, meetings could be held in Pajala, Aapua, Nattavaara and Kiruna. The collection of facts and meetings with people forms the basis of the work. The task is to get an overall picture of how assimilation policy against minorities has affected the people of Tornedalen.



*Rapids boats at Äihämäjoki, Tärendö parish in the Torne Valley. Photo: Olof Hasslöf/Bohuslän Museum.*

<sup>42</sup>["Då var jag som en fånge." Statens övergrepp på tornedalingar och meänkielitalare under 1800 och 1900 talet– STR-T \(str-t.com\)](https://www.str-t.com/)

## 6. The health aspect

The experiences of our Nordic neighbors and from similar processes held around the world, for example in Canada, shows that it is important to consider the health aspect at an early stage. Starting to talk about historical traumas and difficult experiences reopens wounds, memories and emotions that need to be handled with care. It is of great importance that professional healthcare professionals with psychosocial skills are available both at meetings and in connection with interviews for those people who need help and support. Preparatory work and specific financial resources are required for the mission to be carried out in a satisfactory manner. There are voices that fear that a truth commission risks re-traumatizing those affected and their families. A few responses submitted to the project were anonymous on the grounds that their memories and experiences of exclusion and abuse were so painful that they did not want to be exposed once again. These include Sami children who have been relocated by social services without the idea of maintaining a cohesive cultural context, or sexual abuse in institutions.

In order to prepare for future work, the Sami knowledge network<sup>43</sup> has been contacted. The Knowledge Network for Sami Health works with five county coordinators and one main coordinator. The network has a steering group and a political reference group, with representatives from the northern regions, Sami Parliament and Sami organizations. Sofia Kling (main coordinator), Yvonne Wiklund (Region Västerbotten), Suzanna Westberg (Dalarna), Naadja Östergren (LSS), Britt Sparrock (Sami Parliament), Ellacarin Blind (SSR), Ingela Jönsson (Region Jämtland Härjedalen), Bodil Larsson (Region Norrbotten) and Sami project manager Marie Enoksson participated in a digital meeting on 2 December 2020. Sofia Kling outlined the county coordinators' discussions on how the need for psychosocial support during truth commission meetings can be organized. On the Swedish side, there are not the same resources as in Norway where psychologists from SANKS<sup>44</sup> participate with support at the meetings and interviews that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission arrange. However, there are other possibilities to solve the need for psychosocial support and there are other professions that may also be considered.

The participants in the Sami knowledge network expressed appreciation that the Sami Parliament is proactive and initiates the issue in good time so that the regions have time to make the necessary preparations. They asked questions like:

- What should the regions contribute?
- What are the needs?
- Are training efforts needed?
- Is a national support line needed?
- What is a realistic way of working? People may need support at different stages and different types of support.

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<sup>43</sup> The Knowledge Network for Sami Health is a collaboration aimed at ensuring good health and equal treatment for the Sami people. The cooperation consists of Region Norrbotten, Region Västerbotten, Region Jämtland Härjedalen, Region Dalarna, Sami Parliament, The Swedish Sami Federation, The National Organization of Sami, Same Átnam, Saminuorra and the Swedish Sami National Association (SSR).

<sup>44</sup> SANKS = Sami nasjonal kompetansetjeneste in Norway. SANKS is a specialist health service, which allows investigation and treatment for treating mental health and addiction problems.

- Will special funds be allocated to the regions for this work?

The regions have a mission to be there for the entire population. Call support may be needed at home – not everyone may want to talk directly but need help and support later. If people are found to have a greater need for care, they should be transferred to regular care interventions in the regions, which also need time for preparation. This is the responsibility of the regions and not the Sami Parliament, but Sami Parliament would like to stress the importance of psychosocial support functions being available during the process. These persons shall have Sami cultural and cutting-edge expertise in mental illness, violence, abuse and trauma or addiction/family problems. It must not result in that Sami who get in touch with the work of the Truth Commission are referred to a local health centre. It will not inspire confidence. How this work is to be organized is another question. The Sami parliament as an authority has no formal responsibility for health and medical care issues. It is the responsibility of the State to provide the regions with the means to meet their needs.



*Reindeer herders in Kalls samaby with winter pastures around Åre pack for return to the summer pastures in Skäckerfjällen, probably in the 1920s. In the background you can see Mullfället.  
Photo: Private.*

## 7. Concluding discussion

### *Goal and mandate*

The objectives of a truth commission can usually be divided into three main areas.

- 1) to establish the truth
- 2) provide ways for abuse victims to obtain redress and
- 3) promote societal change so that abuses do not happen again<sup>45</sup>

Many themes and examples are mentioned in conversations and surveys. The overall impression is that everything is intertwined and that it is difficult to discern single themes that can stand on their own. The overall impression is that State Sami politics and legislation have been a classic divide-and-rule policy that has divided the Sami and thus made them enemies of each other. In this way, the colonization, industrialization and extraction of natural resources in the Sami areas has been able to continue without the Sami having much say, not even the Sami communities, which according to the law are property owners. Other Sami have no right to make their voices heard in exploitation cases other than as other local people (civil society). With the advent of the Sami Parliament, an arena has been created where different Sami groups can meet again and debate on their own terms. It is a path to harmonization and an opportunity to start listening to each other, but at the same time it is a painful process for all parties. This is also one reason why the samebys and the samebys national organizations often express distrust of the Sami Parliament, which in turn has many parameters to take into account precisely because of its construction. The structure of the Sami parliament as both a state authority and an elected parliament, underfunded and without self-determination, in itself constitutes an inherent conflict that can cause problems both for the State and for Sami community.

The Sami Parliament's steering group for foundation work before a truth commission believes that the truth commission in Sweden should be given a broad mandate to carry out a historical survey, describe the consequences of Swedification processes and propose measures to address historical and contemporary abuses, traumas and contradictions. The truth commission will map historical events, life events, consequences of the State's policy for the Sami, individuals, families and groups. At the society level, the truth about Sweden as a colonizing State must be investigated. Those Sami who want to tell their story to the Truth Commission should be able to do so without demarcations and limitations. Anyone who chooses to share their story must be free to choose what is important to tell. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>46</sup> should guide the work of international law and human rights.

### *Adequate time and resources*

The Steering Group stresses the importance that the commission members be granted a great deal of maneuvering room and sufficient time and resources. This is in line with what Dr Julia Raue, adviser to Pablo De Greiff (the UN Special Rapporteur on Truth, Justice, Compensation

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<sup>45</sup> According to Eduardo Gonzalez, sociologist and expert on truth commissions and transitional justice:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxSJOq0RKyM&t=2s>

<sup>46</sup> [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples | United Nations For Indigenous Peoples](#)

and Guarantees of Non-Repetition), said: "It is important that a commission is given the power it needs to achieve something. It is important that the mandate is made clear because the power of a commission directly depends on the design of the mandate. It is important to know what it wants the commission to achieve and what period of time and what area it should highlight so that expectations of the commission are reasonable..."<sup>47</sup> The commission shall be able to propose far-reaching measures and to raise the bar for any subsequent legal proceedings.

### *The importance of psychosocial support*

The steering group cannot stress enough the importance of offering psychosocial support to those Sami who share their life stories during the time the truth commission operates. The Sami Parliament proposes the creation of a special unit responsible for psychosocial support in connection with the work of the truth commission. However, this issue must be dealt with further by the Cabinet Office; Ministry of Culture and The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, in preparation for the establishment of a truth commission. The Sami Parliament considers that the regions concerned should be given a specific mandate and special means of cooperation with the truth commission.

### *Members of the Commission*

Members of a truth commission may be appointed based on merit, trust or representativeness. In Norway, the 12 members were appointed by Stortinget, following a process that was preceded by dialogue with the Sami Parliament and others. The commissioners are primarily appointed on the basis of their competence and because they enjoy a great deal of confidence both in Norwegian society, in Sami community and in other minority groups covered by the truth commission. They represent only themselves but shall ensure that everyone is heard. Some of the commissioners are Sami. In Finland, the approach was decided based on representativeness; two of the five members have been appointed by the Finnish Sami Parliament, one by the Skolt Sameby committee and two by the Finnish State. The Sami Parliament members elected their representatives after open interviews with several proposed candidates. The Commissioners appointed by the Sami Parliament in Finland were subsequently elected based on their merits and established confidence, not on the basis of ethnicity.

During the foundation work on the Swedish side, some voices have considered that the commissioners should be Sami for the Sami people to trust to share their lives in interviews and for all Sami groups to be represented in the truth commission. This view is not shared by the majority and not by the steering group, which considers it more important that the truth commission should be impartial and objective. The future commissioners will have a broad competence and a considerable trust capital both in Swedish society and in the Sami community. They are expected to work without preconditions. From a human rights, international and indigenous perspective, they should not be colored by the State's colonial view and division of the Sami people. A commissioner who is Sami can have important inside perspectives and natural entrances to certain groups of Sami, but also be colored by their own

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<sup>47</sup> DO's memos from the seminar in Umeå 2016-10-25-26, <https://www.sametinget.se/125416>

history. Commissioners are expected to work freely from prejudice, assumptions and categorizing attitudes towards Sami. On the other hand, it is of great importance that interviews can take place in the language of the person himself, and therefore Sami-speaking interpreters and translators must be linked to the commission.

International experts/commissioners may be required to assist in the work as the view of Sami people has been highly categorizing for decades. For example, reindeer herding Northern Sami have been a strong Sami norm, while other Sami groups have been marginalized and assimilated, such as Southern Sami, Forest Sami and non-reindeer herding Sami. A truth commission must not be perceived as biased but must work inclusively with all Sami groups. Other international commissions can probably contribute with significant experience in terms of the process required for the Sami people in Sweden.

An international experience and important aspect to take into account is that perpetrators should not sit in the commission themselves. For example, since Church and State have been strongly interconnected throughout history and Church representatives have often been the extended arm of the State, it is not appropriate for representatives of the Church of Sweden to examine themselves.

### *Archive questions*

The purpose of the truth commission is to review and make Swedish Sami politics visible and its consequences for the Sami people. How and where the collected material is to be archived needs to be handled. It is important that the commission can offer real anonymity and confidentiality where necessary.

### *Expectations and requirements from Sami Parliament*

The Sami Parliament expects the government to continue to work in close dialogue with the Sami Parliament and to give the Sami Parliament influence in the drafting of directives for the commission and the election of commissioners. The steering group must be involved in the further process of the directives. The steering group's view is that the Sami Parliament's plenary should also be given the opportunity to accept the directives and the government's proposals for commissioners before the decision is implemented.

*Great it's finally happening. I hope it leads to something more than just a piece of paper and an apology.*

*I am glad that this is happening now, when I am young and when my áddjá (grandfather) is still here and can see it.*

*That the result is translated into measures to unite the Sami and, as far as possible, restore wrongdoings and abuse.*

*In my opinion, the truth commission should be uncompromising! After all the injustice that the Swedish State has subjected us to, the truth commission must reflect that and really give us the justice we deserve!*

## Appendix 1: A Historical Overview

*Summery by Marie Enoksson*

For thousands of years, northern Scandinavia was sparsely populated with little or no contact with the southern regions of Scandinavia. Old maps describe an uncharted land area. Several thousand Stone Age settlements have been documented. Coins found at Sami sacrificial sites reveal trade with Novgorod to the east around 1000 AD and old burial sites witness of cultural contacts between Sami and Vikings. People hunted and fished, gathered berries and herbs, and later even practiced reindeer husbandry and farming.

The colonization of the Bothnian sea coast began in 1100 AD. For a long time, the Sami were in majority in the so-called *Lappmarken* (Sami lands). They moved between different hunting grounds, fishing waters and followed the natural migration routes of the reindeer herds. The development towards more large-scale reindeer husbandry practices began first around 1600 AD, probably because of increasing taxation demands. The connection between the Sami and the Swedish Crown was first managed by so-called *birkarls*, a loosely organized group that collected taxes and bought furs, and later by Crown-designated *lappfogds*, (Lapp bailiffs). The Swedish Crown claimed the right to the areas north of Hälsningland in the 1300's. Gävle was founded in 1446. The cities of Hudiksvall, Härnosand and Umeå were founded in the 1500's. Pioneer farming was encouraged but was concentrated along the more fertile Bothnia coastline. Determined legislature to gain control of the Lappmarks began during the reign of Carl IX and continued over the age of maximum expansion of the Swedish empire. During this time, 1611 – 1721, Sweden was constantly at war. In 1634, silver was discovered in Nasafjäll and the Crown was hoping that Norrland could be a colony that would then by default contribute new resources to the kingdom. The *Lappmarksplaketet* (Lapland Proclamation) of 1673 was an attempt to encourage settlers to the Lapland region. These settlers were offered 15 years free from taxation and exempt from being drafted for war. The settlers were not to disturb the Sami in their activities nor cultivate land included in the Sami taxation lands, only use land that was not being used by the Sami. The proclamation was renewed in 1695. The settlers could cultivate fields and pastures, but excessive slash-and-burn practices were not allowed.

In connection with the Crown's endeavor to integrate the entire country's population, attempts were made to baptize the Sami and convert them to loyal Swedish subjects. The common practice was through missionary work, establishing parishes in the Lappmarks and setting up Sami schools. This work was rather slow since it was difficult to get the Sami to visit the churches. There are stories of forced baptisms and threats. The King Carl XI ordered lagmansting (trials) to be held in the Lappmarks to evaluate the Sami idolatry practices. The Sami religion was to be crushed, the shaman drums to be burned, natural symbolic symbols (*sieidi*) demolished, and Sami holy grounds violated. But it was the Christian revivals such as Laestadianism in the 1800's that finally put an end to the practice of the old Sami religion. The national border between Sweden and Norway was defined by the Strömstads Treaty in 1751. Even the border to Lapland was established in the middle of the 1700's. This was to be a border between the inland region where the Sami could practice their traditional livelihoods, and the coast where Swedish and Finnish farmers cultivated the land. However, the border did not fulfill its purpose with the increasing population. Technical developments and



infrastructure made it possible to exploit and extract natural resources such as iron ore, hydropower, and forests. Immigration came from the east, especially in northernmost Sweden. Other driving factors behind the colonization were larger families and a need for more land. Sami and Finnish were the main languages spoken farthest to the north, up until strict Swedish assimilation policies were put into practice in the beginning of the 1900's. Up until the 1800's, all citizens of the Lappmarks shared the same rights. In pace with the increasing colonization of the Lappmarks, the Sami were forced to witness as the pioneers settled down on the Lapp tax lands. Conflicts occurred between the pioneers and Sami about fishing lakes and grazing grounds. In general, the Sami won these conflicts in the 1700's, but the pioneers won more often later in the 1800's. As a measure to protect their land, some Sami even took up farming. Many Sami have been described as "pioneers" despite that they were often Sami who registered homesteads on their tax land to secure their land.

The lost rights to tax land over the period 1600's – 1900's through delimitation of land and other proceedings as well as the transformation of Lapp tax land to so-called "lappbyar" (later referred to as *samebyar*, a reindeer herding community; also the geographical area in which the members are entitled to pursue reindeer husbandry) destroyed the livelihoods for the Forest, Hunting and Fishing Sami. The conditions of the Sami changed when Sweden lost Finland in 1809. The Swedish administration was still valid in Finland up until the middle of the 1800's, but the Russian administration eventually affected the Sami society up north, mostly in Kemi Lappmark, but also in Torne Lappmark.

New ideas began to spread at the turn of the nineteenth century. First about higher and lower status cultures, later about superior and inferior races. According to the first theory, nomads stood at a lower cultural level than farmers. Thus, nomads must give way where farming encroached. This resulted in the Sami losing vast land areas in the Jämtland-Härjedalen and Norrbotten-Västerbotten regions. By the middle of the 1800's, more people began to react to the unfair treatment of the Sami. The Swedish Riksdag tried to straighten out the worst of the abuse. The redistribution of lands stopped in Jämtland-Härjedalen in 1841. The State later bought land to be used by the reindeer-herding Sami, so-called *skattefjäll* (tax land in the mountain regions).

Since the Lappmark border was no longer served as protection for the Sami, a new border was drawn, the so called *odlingsgränsen* (cultivation border), running in a north-south direction in Norrbotten and Västerbotten. The land west of this border was to be reserved for reindeer husbandry, which at that time was considered to have national economic value. The Sami legal right to let reindeer graze on private land during winter in Norrbotten and Västerbotten was confirmed at the beginning of the 1870's. This law also applied in Jämtland-Härjedalen from 1889. According to this law, reindeer shall be allowed to wander freely where they have grazed "according to old customary practices".

During the closing decades of the 1800's biological racism penetrated the Swedish Sami policies. Sami were alleged to be born with certain "racial characteristics" that deemed them inferior to the rest of the population. Thus, they could not live as "civilized" people in proper houses. This would result in the Sami becoming lazy and neglecting their reindeer. Then they would all become beggars since they were unable to do anything other than take care of reindeer. Race theory and skull measurements expanded, and the extermination of the Sami was only a matter of time. In 1922 Uppsala University founded the State Institute for Racial Biology. Its primary purpose was racial hygiene, to preserve the purity of the Swedish race.

The institute's first head Herman Lundborg enjoyed travelling the northern regions of Sweden where he measured, photographed, and compared appearances with particular focus on Sami and the people of the Torne valley (border region along Torne River between Sweden and Finland). Lundborg's so-called research on racial classification and other group's typical appearances has persisted in people's consciousness long after his death and the skull measurements of school children continued up until the 1950's.

In correlation with the adoption of the Reindeer Grazing Act of 1928, those Sami who were not reindeer herders would no longer have any Sami rights and for example no special right to hunting and fishing on their own ancestral lands. The State thus drew a sharp border between those Sami who practiced reindeer husbandry and those who lived off other livelihoods. No consideration was taken to the Sami tradition of combining livelihoods in certain areas. Even schooling was affected by racism. A law was passed on special nomad schools in 1913. Teaching was carried out in traditional tipi tents and only included a few subjects that were to be taught at such a low level that the children did not risk becoming "civilized". In 1946 these tent schools were replaced by several boarding schools placed in different areas. Teaching followed the Swedish semester schedule and students boarded during regular semesters. The children of nomadic Sami were not allowed to attend the public schools, non-reindeer herding Sami were excluded from the nomad schools. Nor were the children of the forest Sami allowed to attend the nomad schools, despite that many were reindeer herders. The State thus ran in parallel and actively both segregation and assimilation policies.

Several investigations conducted during the 1920's – 1930's ascertained that the Sami were living in extreme poverty. At this time, the State invested enormous resources to populate the inner parts of Norrland with so-called *kronotorpare* (Crown tenant farmers). Even though many Sami began settling down and farming plots of land, the opinion of the authorities was that the Sami were simply not capable of such work. Still in 1941 the Swedish Agricultural Board meant that Sami were not suitable for farm work for "race-biological reasons". Neither would employers such as the national railroad or the LKAB mining company employ Sami – they should live as nomads. So, in order to support their families many Sami were forced to play down their Sami heritage and among other things change their Sami surnames. The result of the Second World War meant that racist policy was no longer viable. A silence culture spread instead. Industrialism with large scale forestry, construction of hydropower dams, mines, roads and railways caused problems for the Sami culture. Sami were also helped by many of the advances, but the space for the traditional Sami livelihoods, land use, language and culture gradually shrank. The expansion of the mining and power industry meant devastation of reindeer grazing land, hunting and fishing grounds. The Government stripped the Sami of their language, lands and customary rights. Reindeer husbandry and the Sami culture became a burden. The Sami were to settle down, integrate into the Swedish society and preferably work with something else.