

Speech by Hakan Jonsson, President of the Sami Parliament in Sweden



Visit by the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Ms Victoria Tauli- Corpuz

Hemavan, Sweden, 2015-08-25--27

Excellences,

Representatives of the Sami parliaments and Nordic governments,

Friends and colleagues,

Let me first express my gratitude to the Special Rapporteur, Ms Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, for your willingness to travel and participate in this conference, initiated and hosted by the Sami Parliamentarian Council. The mandate of the Special Rapporteur is incredibly important for us Sami and for other indigenous peoples in the world, so that we can continue developing our culture and way of life. Your work is invaluable and much appreciated. Together with my colleagues in Finland and Norway we hope to be able to ensure that indigenous rights will be respected in the Nordic countries in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP).

Secondly, it is my pleasure to welcome all of you to this conference in Hemavan. We are in Sápmi, the traditional lands of my forefathers. We have lived here since time immemorial, managing the lands and waters with utmost respect. It is a great honour and a privilege for me to share these words with you in this important gathering.

The topics I especially want to stress in my presentation is the environment, and the consequences of the extraction of natural resources on Sami lands, discrimination of Sami through history and today, especially the rights to land and water and self-determination and meaningful consultation with our governments.

Environment

Sápmi contains enormous natural resources of considerable natural and cultural value. For instance, 95% of Europe's total iron ore production comes from Sami lands in Sweden. Hundreds of sites in Sápmi are prospected for minerals at the moment. The government and private companies are extracting natural resources from our lands and waters, for example minerals, forests and energy, without us having a voice in the process, and least of all in the decision to do so.

The Sami parliament of Sweden has adopted a program called "Minerals and mines in Sápmi". In it, we demand that no further mineral exploitations take place in Sápmi until the Swedish government has implemented the UNDRIP, ILO 169 and ensured the human rights of the Sami people. Special attention needs to be given to that:

- areas particularly valuable for our culture and our trades are protected against infringement and other disturbances
- precautionary and sustainable use is realized
- no additional large-scale exploitation is to take place
- the combined use of natural resources within the traditional Sami areas of settlement are in harmony with the ecological system within which the trades are carried out (since sustainable reindeer husbandry, hunting, fishing, gathering and farming depend on a long-term use of natural resources)
- the use and exploitation of land and water resources do not further deplete the needs of the Sami trades

It is vital that the Sami land and waters are managed so that the needs of the Sami to use them for reindeer herding, hunting, fishing, culture, spirituality as well as other areas, are provided for first hand.

Today there is no collective picture of how the Sami use their land. It is important to see the effects of disturbances both on a regional level and on cumulative, long-term effects. Many Sami reindeer districts feel that their lands are so incredibly pressed that they cannot withstand any further exploitation. There are also many Sami outside Sami reindeer-herding and economic districts that use land and waters for hunting, fishing and farming. They must also be ensured their rights to land and water. Great consideration of this issue is a demand.

Self-determination

A part of the right to self-determination is to give indigenous peoples the right to decide on and exercise influence over their land and water areas, natural resources and traditional forms of

living. Several UN agencies have emphasized that indigenous people have the right to control their traditional land and water areas, natural resources and traditional forms of livelihoods. All natural resources above and below ground within the traditional Sami land areas belong to the Sami people, but this situation is far away from being realized in Swedish legislation.

Discrimination

In modern history, the Sami have been the holders of so-called lapps-katteland, Sami tax-lands. Dividing up land between different families was necessary to be able to carry on hunting, fishing and reindeer herding. Tax lands could be both inherited and sold. During the 1700's and 1800's, the Sami gradually lost the right of possession of their old lands. Since the Swedish authorities no longer respected the Sami tax-lands, the county administrative board suggested that they should be abolished, which the Swedish Riksdag decided in 1928.

The Sami right has thus gradually been hollowed out in Swedish legislation. In the first Reindeer Grazing Act of 1886 the Sami's individual right to use land and water became a collective right. And the Samis that were hunters and fishers, not reindeer herders, lost all their rights. This was done to transform a People's right to a Trade right. This discrimination remains today.

In my opinion, we would in fact need a Sami Act, a law that comprises all Sami, not only the reindeer herding Sami, and takes account of and respects the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples. I also want to see actions taken by the Swedish government to provide a system for effective consultation and dialogue between the Sami parliament and the Swedish government.

Conclusion

Sweden has confirmed the status of the Sami people as being an indigenous people, a national minority and a people. Changes were made in the constitution in 2011. Confirming the status of the Sami means that you cannot avoid international law, human rights and recommendations from the UN among others.

In many ways, the majority community can learn from the way the Sami think. In these times when we all must find ways to mitigate climate change, the Sami approach can be a model for others. In accordance with environmentally sustainable and long-term thinking, we want to point out the need to invest in recycling minerals, rather than increased exploitation and new mining.

The Nordic countries have a good reputation on human right issues and often stand as role models. However, a closer look on how Sweden treats the Sami reveals that Sweden's respect for human rights have yet to include the human rights of its Indigenous People. Sweden is a great country to live in for those who wish to be and are able to be assimilated into the majority society. For us, who wish to remain and develop as Sami, it is not such an easy life.

We hope that the dialogue during this conference will result in legal amendments that will give the Sami people more influence on all matters affecting our lives, that the negotiations on the Nordic Sami Convention will be successful and the adoption of ILO 169 move forward. I do want to believe that Sweden, and the Nordic countries as a whole, will respect indigenous rights more seriously in the future.

Thank you for your attention.