



“I want a better life for my people”

A summary of the proposals given by the Sámi Truth
and Reconciliation Commission in Finland

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Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Finland

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1 The Past

The State of Finland was established on the lands of two peoples, the Sámi and Finns.

Unlike Norway and Sweden, Finland did not have legislation that obliged educational institutions to assimilate Sámi children into Finnish culture and life. Even so, the stories that the Commission heard from Sámi people indicate that assimilation was an unwritten practice that prevailed in schools in past decades and in the dormitories in use until the late 20th century. Finland's school and dormitories system where Finnish culture and language were the norm has served as a strong instrument for assimilation, which has caused a decline in the passing down of Sámi languages and culture from one generation to the next. In boarding schools, children were separated from their families, the use of their own languages was restricted, and schools only taught in the language of mainstream culture and according to that culture's values. As a result, many children lost contact with their own language and identity, and the impacts are still visible in the Sámi communities in the form of endangered languages and cultural losses. These traumas caused by assimilation have been carried over from one Sámi generation to the next.

The churches and revival movements were involved and supported the activities and objectives of the state in which an effort was made to replace the Sámi lifestyle with a Finnish one. The impact of these measures extends deep into the Sámi world view, values, and mental and social structures.

The independent State of Finland has continued to encroach deeper into the Sámi lifestyle in the same way those previously in power did. Work began to build the independent country of Finland into a culturally harmonious country, where the economy was primarily based on agriculture and forestry. The Finnish administrative and legislative system replaced the Sámi social system based on the traditional Siida structure, and Sámi lands and waters were divided in accordance with Finnish jurisdiction. During the Great Partition and the division of river basin areas in the municipalities of Enontekiö, Inari and Utsjoki, the Sámi, who were not fluent in Finnish were unable to defend the lands their families had right of use

to for generations and which they had used for fishing, reindeer husbandry and hunting. The areas to which Sámi families had right of use were transferred to the state.

At the end of the Second World War, almost all inhabitants of the Sámi areas were evacuated due to military operations. The transfer of the Skolt Sámi settlement in the Petsamo area to the municipality of Inari proved to be permanent after the wars. The destruction caused by the wars was extensive in the Sámi Homeland, and the state directed considerable resources to northern Finland's reconstruction, which led to rapid regional development. Northern Finland was rebuilt according to a Finnish model, and the aim was to make efficient use of Lapland's natural resources. Finnish society and the authorities grip on the north tightened.

Europe's largest reservoirs, Lokka and Porttipahta, were built to meet the energy needs of Finnish society, as a result of which the residents of the area were displaced from their homes and forced to move elsewhere. Power plants built in the Paatsjoki and Tuulomajoki rivers in the Soviet Union offered work and brought new residents to the municipality of Inari, while the regulation of Lake Inari had an impact on the fishing and living conditions of the Inari Sámi. Extensive felling in turn, affected reindeer husbandry. The transformation of traditional livelihoods and culture led to the deterioration of the Sámi livelihood base. This caused the Sámi to migrate from the Sámi Homeland.

2 The Present

The Sámi have had to adapt to various changes and to pressures from society outside their communities. Despite this, the Sámi have not remained passive bystanders but have always been active in defending their communities and lands. As a result, the Sámi culture is still alive, vibrant and communal.

The living space of the Sámi is constantly shrinking. The impacts of climate change were clearly visible in the living environment of the Sámi Homeland in the 1980s and 1990s and have accelerated in the 2000s. The Sámi are facing climate change and related extreme weather phenomena without sufficient resources and means for adaptation. The direct impacts of climate change on reindeer husbandry have been apparent for a long time. Water bodies and fishing are also at the forefront of change. Due to the shrinking of salmon populations, salmon fishing in the Tana River has been prohibited for many years. This threatens to destroy the entire Sámi culture in the Tana River area.

The Sámi culture and their traditional livelihoods are also being placed in peril by various land use pressures, such as forestry, expanding tourism and mechanical gold prospecting. The rights of the Sámi as an indigenous people are enshrined in several international conventions and the Constitution of Finland. In practice, this protection is poorly implemented in practice in land use projects or plans. The new operators will take part of the grazing areas required by reindeer husbandry and Sámi fishing sites.

In addition, mining and wind power construction as well as the Finnish Defence Forces, with their increasing exercises in the area, are new, wide-ranging land users. Although there are not yet any mines or wind farms in the Sámi Homeland, ore prospecting already takes place in the area and there are also plans for wind power. The Arctic region's importance to defence policy has grown, which has led to a significant increase in defence policy projects and activities. The Sámi share concern for national security and want to develop cooperation with the Defence Forces.

The Sámi languages have become endangered, and they are passed down to new generations less and less and in some places they are no longer passed down at all. Even so, Inari, Skolt and Northern Sámi still continue to be mother tongues and are recovering. The language rights of the Sámi are currently mainly realised only in the Sámi Homeland, even though the rights should be safeguarded throughout the country. The majority of the Sámi population live outside the Sámi Homeland. The linguistic equality of the Sámi is currently not realised, and the resources allocated for organising early childhood education and care and primary education in the Sámi languages are insufficient. Legislation on education does not even safeguard the right of Sámi children and young people living outside the homeland to study Sámi as a mother tongue at school.

Legislation lays a strong foundation for safeguarding the provision of health and social services in the Sámi languages and in line with Sámi culture, but the practical implementation of the services is inadequate and does not meet the needs of the Sámi. There are hardly any services provided in Skolt and Inari Sámi. Services in one's own language and according to one's own culture have not been secured outside the Sámi Homeland. The Sámi's experiences of shortcomings in cultural services may lead to the Sámi avoiding treatment, and to misunderstandings and a lack of trust.

There is a clear structural lack of knowledge in Finland concerning Sámi culture and the indigenous status of the Sámi. Society's lack of knowledge on the Sámi affects the attitudes and prejudices of the majority population towards the Sámi and leads to everyday racism and discrimination.

This lack of knowledge is partly due to Finnish children not being taught about Sámi history and culture and the status of the Sámi as one of the world's indigenous peoples at school. A large share of Finns form their understanding of the Sámi through a scattered catalogue of images of the Sámi and publicity focusing on conflicts.

This wide-ranging lack of knowledge has societal significance. Lack of knowledge on the Sámi weakens the functioning of democracy and the Sámi's opportunities to participate in societal decision-making. The majority population do not always believe the information provided by the Sámi, and they do not want to use it, whether it is information on grazing conditions provided by reindeer herding cooperatives, fishing in the Tana River or other matters related to traditional Sámi knowledge and society. As a result, decisions are often made on the basis of insufficient information.

3 The Future

In addition to their shared history, the Sámi and Finns will share a common future. The Commission believes that the path towards reconciliation will only begin once when the State recognises and acknowledges that the Finnish State has been established on the lands of two people, the Sámi and the Finns. The Commission finds that it necessary for the State to recognise and assume responsibility for historic injustices, such the assimilation policies in boarding schools that violated human rights and discrimination based on ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

The Sámi Homeland is the heartland and homeland of the Sámi languages, Sámi culture and the Sámi's traditional livelihoods. The future will require both the vitality of the homeland and the safeguarding of the legal status of the Sámi living outside it.

The Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Finland has received proposals on how to improve the legal status of the Sámi from nearly 400 Sámi people and dozens of experts as well as from the authors of the 25 separate reports it has commissioned. On the basis of these, the Commission has drawn up its proposals contained in this report.

The Commission welcomes the adoption of the reform to the Act on the Sámi Parliament in summer 2025. The new act will improve the ability for the Sámi Parliament to participate in and influence decision-making on matters concerning the Sámi. The reform of the Act on the Sámi Parliament is a step forward in promoting the rights of the Sámi. It is important that other acts are coordinated with the new Act on the Sámi Parliament. The principle of free, prior and informed consent must be included in all legislation, official regulations and measures that may affect the Sámi.

The State must promote the implementation of the Nordic Sámi Convention. The State must ensure cross-border cooperation between the Sámi in education and training, health and social services, livelihoods and taxation.

The Government must adopt the UN International Labour Organization's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169) by bringing the convention to be ratified by Parliament.

Sámi reindeer husbandry needs its own law and administration. The State must acknowledge the fishing rights of the Sámi in the Sámi Homeland by amending fishing legislation. The holders of fishing rights among the Sámi in Tana River area must be guaranteed a real opportunity to participate in and influence negotiations on fishing and their outcome. The Skolt Act should be developed in cooperation with the Skolt Saami Village Committee so it supports in particular self-governance and the right to self-determination as an indigenous people. The authorities must guarantee the preconditions for the preservation of traditional livelihoods in Skolt areas and traditional residential areas of the Inari Sámi. The transgenerational rights to land use held by the Sámi, which are not included in the property register and are independent of land ownership, must be investigated.

All Sámi children and young people in Finland must have the right to learn and develop their own language and culture regardless of where they live. The Sámi perspective must be integrated into general health care and social welfare in which the Sámi must have the opportunity to choose services in their own language and according to their culture. The work of *Uvjj - Uvjâ - Uvja*, a unit providing national psychosocial support for the Sámi, established in connection with the Commission, should be made permanent.

The final report of the Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Finland is a first step towards reconciliation. Improving the rights of the Sámi will require concrete measures. This will require the State to commit to a long-term and consistent Sámi policy. The Commission finds that it is vital for this final report to also be submitted to Parliament.

The Commission proposes that a unit coordinating Sámi affairs, headed by the State Secretary for the Sámi, be established in the Prime Minister's Office. The State Secretary will be appointed by the Government in cooperation with the Sámi Parliament and the Skolt Saami Village Committee. The State Secretary for the Sámi must be supported by an expert group consisting of representatives appointed by ministries, the Sámi Parliament and the Skolt Saami Village Committee.

The Commission proposes that the Government prepare a report to Parliament every parliamentary term on how the rights of the Sámi have been strengthened.

It is crucial for the success of the truth and reconciliation process and for real reconciliation that the knowledge and understanding people have of the status of the Sámi as the only indigenous people in Finland and Europe increase.

The Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Finland hopes that its work will open the way for reconciliation so that Finland's two peoples, the Finns and the Sámi, can live together in good cooperation with each other.

4 Proposals for measures by the Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Finland

The proposed measures presented below are based on consultations with the Sámi population and experts carried out by the Commission and on separate reports prepared for the Commission. The proposed measures are based on the Commission's understanding of the policy guidelines and measures required to ensure the Sámi people a good future.

At the end of each proposal, the Commission has named the parties responsible for its implementation in brackets.

1. The Sámi people in the Finnish government

- A unit coordinating Sámi affairs, headed by the State Secretary for the Sámi, will be established in the Prime Minister's Office. The State Secretary will be appointed by the Government in cooperation with the Sámi Parliament and the Skolt Saami Village Committee. The State Secretary for the Sámi must be supported by an expert group consisting of representatives appointed by ministries, the Sámi Parliament and the Skolt Saami Village Committee. (VN/VNK)
- During each parliamentary term, the Government will prepare a report for Parliament on how the legal status of the Sámi has been improved. (VN/VNK)
- The resources of the Sámi Parliament must be adequately increased in order to safeguard the right to self-determination and self-governance as well as to facilitate the performance of statutory duties. (OM, VM)

- The Skolt Act should be developed in cooperation with the Skolt Saami Village Committee so it supports Skolt Sámi self-governance and their right to self-determination as an indigenous people. The additional resources required for development must be secured and the general government funding of the Skolt Saami Village Committee's governance must be included in the central government budget funding and the position of the persons responsible for the Siida governance system must be converted into public-service employment relationships. (VM, MMM, OM)
- The State must promote the implementation of the Nordic Sámi Convention. The State must ensure cross-border cooperation between the Sámi in education and training, health and social services, livelihoods and taxation. (UM, VM, OM, STM, OKM, LVM, TEM, MMM, Sámi Parliament)
- The Government must adopt the UN International Labour Organization's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169) by bringing the convention to Parliament for ratification. (VN, UM)
- The State must consistently implement the policies of the European Court of Human Rights and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination as well as the principles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). (VN, all ministries and their subordinate authorities)
- The principles of the new Act on the Sámi Parliament and the obligation to cooperate and negotiate contained in it must be included in all legislation, official regulations and measures that may affect the Sámi. Laws must be coordinated in line with the FPIC principle (principle of free, prior informed consent) adopted in international indigenous law. (The State, authorities)
- The state must recognise and acknowledge how the rights of the Sámi have been neglected in connection with the NATO membership and DCA agreement processes. (VN, PLM)
- The State must work together with the Sámi Parliament to draw up clear instructions on how the rights of the Sámi should be taken into account in connection with decisions and actions related to defence policy. The State must promote equal consideration of indigenous peoples' rights in the defence activities of the Nordic countries. (PLM)

2. The Sámi's living environment

- Together with the Sámi Climate Council, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry must draw up a programme for adaptation to climate change based on research and traditional knowledge. (MMM, Sámi Parliament, Skolt Saami Village Committee, Sámi Climate Council)
- The State must establish the Sámi Business and Climate Fund in connection with the Sámi Parliament. The fund can be used to support climate action and the profitability of traditional Sámi livelihoods. (OM, MMM, VM)
- The remaining state-owned old-growth forests in the Sámi Homeland must be protected from felling. (MMM, Metsähallitus)
- Metsähallitus must pay compensation to Sámi reindeer herders for the damage already caused by forestry. (Metsähallitus)
- The Mining Act must be amended so that a decision on a mining claims in the Sámi Homeland can be appealed to the Administrative Court. (TEM)

3. Traditional livelihoods

- Provisions on Sámi reindeer husbandry must be laid down in its own law and a separate governance must be established for Sámi reindeer husbandry. The legislative reform must be prepared in cooperation with the Sámi reindeer herders and the Sámi Parliament. (MMM, Sámi Parliament, Skolt Saami Village Committee, Saamelaispaliskunnat ry)
- The provisions on the granting the right to use of reindeer ear tags must be amended with regard to the tags in the Sámi area so that the Sámi people's right to self-determination is realised. (MMM, Reindeer Herders' Association, Sámi Parliament Skolt Saami Village Committee, Saamelaispaliskunnat ry)
- The assessment of reindeer damage and compensation under the Reindeer Damages Act must be carried out in a timely manner without delay. (VN, MMM, Luke, Reindeer Herders' Association)
- The State must acknowledge the fishing rights of the Sámi in the Sámi Homeland in fishing legislation. (VN, MMM)

- The State must ensure that the Sámi have the right to participate in decision-making concerning fishing in the Sámi Homeland. (VN, MMM)
- The transgenerational rights to land use held by the Sámi, which are not included in the property register and are independent of land ownership, must be investigated. (MMM, MML)
- When negotiating on the Tana River Fishing Regulation between Finland and Norway, the precondition must be the protection and vitality of the Sámi salmon fishing culture in the Tana Valley and that it can be passed down to future generations. The traditional knowledge of Sámi who catch salmon must be taken into account equally alongside research data. (VN, MMM, Luke)
- The holders of fishing rights among the Sámi in Tana River area must be guaranteed a real opportunity to participate in and influence negotiations on fishing and their outcome. (VN, MMM)
- Sámi people who hold fishing rights and their heirs must be recognised as their own group of fishermen regardless of their place of residence in the Tana River system. (VN, MMM)
- The Sámi who hold fishing rights and the municipality of Utsjoki must be paid compensation for the total bans on salmon fishing in the Tana River, which began in 2021. (VN, VM, MMM)
- The Inari Sámi must be guaranteed opportunities to influence the development of the living environment and livelihoods in their traditional residential areas. (Metsähallitus, municipalities, Regional Council of Lapland, MMM)
- The state must invest in education and research on fisheries in the Sámi Homeland. (MMM, Luke, OKM, SOGSAKK)

4. Sámi cultural heritage

- The intellectual property rights of the Sámi should be improved and mechanisms created that safeguard the protection of the Sámi's traditional knowledge, cultural expressions and other intellectual property as well as their fair use and distribution of benefits. (VN, OKM, Sámi Parliament)

- The State must increase Siida's resources; Siida is the largest Sámi Museum in the Nordic countries and better resources would allow it to carry out its continuously expanding tasks resulting from such things as the return of artefacts. (OKM, Finnish Heritage Agency)
- Yle must secure sufficient resources for Sámi-language programming. (YLE)
- The continuity of the Young Sámi Art Event must be secured with sufficient and separate annual funding. (OKM)
- The discretionary government grants allocated for supporting Sámi cultural and organisational activities must be increased. (OKM)
- Permanent and sufficient funding must be secured for the Skolt Saami Cultural Foundation. (MMM)

5. Health and social services for the Sámi

- The activities of the unit for the psychosocial support of the Sámi must be made permanent. Sufficient resources must be allocated to allow it to operate nationally, in addition to which the activities must be secured by separate legislation. (STM, Lapha, Sámi Parliament, Skolt Saami Village Committee)
- The Sámi perspective should be included in general health care and social welfare policy. The Sámi must have the opportunity to choose services provided in their own language and according to their own culture throughout the country. (STM, wellbeing services counties, Sámi Parliament)
- Secondary and higher education institutions must organise education in the health and social services sector that takes the Sámi languages and culture into account. The Sámi Education Institute must be appointed as the unit responsible and the coordinator for this education. (Universities, universities of applied sciences, SOGSAKK, STM)
- Steps must be taken to improve the Sámi language skills of current health and social services personnel and their knowledge of Sámi culture and history. (OKM, universities of applied sciences, universities, SOGSAKK)
- Sufficient and long-term funding from the central government budget must be secured for SámiSoster, the national Sámi health and social services sector organisation. (STM)

6. Sámi languages and Sámi studies

Sámi languages and language work

- The Sámi Language Act must be reformed to meet today's situation and needs. The Sámi Language Act should be amended to improve the rights of Sámi people who live outside the Sámi Homeland to their own languages. (OKM, OM)
- The practice for entering a person's mother tongue in the Population Information System should be changed to take into account the situation of bilingual and multilingual Sámi population. It must be possible to enter more than one language as a mother tongue. (VM, DVV)
- The State must create the conditions for local Sámi language communities to carry out language work by allocating resources for the establishment of a Sámi Language Centre network in Finland. (OKM, VM)
- The organisation and funding of Sámi Giellagáldu, which is responsible for the language planning, normalisation and language counselling of the Sámi languages, must be made permanent and the inclusion of the Sámi languages spoken in Finland must be ensured in Nordic Sámi language work. (OKM)

Right to one's language and culture

- Every Sámi child and young person in Finland must be guaranteed the opportunity to learn the Sámi language. The right to instruction of the Sámi language as a mother tongue and second language in pre-primary and basic education and upper secondary education must be secured with legislation throughout Finland. (OKM)
- The Basic Education Act must be amended so that also education providers operating outside the Sámi homeland must provide Sámi language instruction to Sámi-speaking pupils. (OKM)
- The passing down of traditional knowledge from one generation to the next should be systematically supported in all Sámi education. (OKM, OPH, municipalities, Sámi Parliament, SOGSAKK)

Sámi early childhood education and care

- The government grants made available through the Sámi Parliament for organising early childhood education and care for Sámi-speaking children must be increased so that funding can also be allocated outside the Sámi Homeland and so that pedagogical guidance is secured for the activities. (OKM)
- Sámi language nests must be acknowledged as part of the official early childhood education and care system, and sufficient and permanent special funding and pedagogical guidance must be secured for them. (OKM)
- The number of employees in Sámi early childhood education and care should be increased by organising both secondary and tertiary education. (OKM, SOGSAKK, higher education institutions)

Language revitalisation in education

- Sámi immersion instruction should be developed into an alternative that develops fluent bilingualism in pre-primary and basic education. (OKM, OPH)
- Funding for school year studies for the adult Sámi population must be secured for both education providers and the persons in working life who are taking part in studies. (OM, OKM)

Strengthening of education in the Sámi languages

- Remote instruction of the Sámi language to people outside the Sámi Homeland should be made permanent and a Sámi e-school should be established, which offers instruction of the Sámi languages and studies in other subjects taught in Sámi from pre-primary education to general upper secondary education. (OKM)
- Funding for the instruction of the Sámi languages and instruction in the Sámi languages must be arranged on the same grounds throughout the country. The funding must apply to pre-primary and basic education as well as general upper secondary education and vocational education and training. (OKM)
- The preconditions for teaching of subjects in Sámi languages should be improved by creating study modules in existing teacher education that take into account the special features of teaching in endangered Sámi languages. (OKM, OY)
- Sufficient funds should be allocated to the creating Sámi-language learning materials. (VM, OKM)

Nordic cooperation in Sámi education

- Finland must strengthen cooperation with the Sámi University of Applied Sciences (Sámi allaskuvla) located in Norway's Koutokeino. (OKM, OY and LaY)
- Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture must work together with the Sámi Parliament to promote Nordic cooperation in Sámi education and remove obstacles to it. (OKM, Sámi Parliament)

Knowledge about the Sámi in teaching for all pupils

- Information on the indigenous Sámi people, the history of the Sámi and their present-day life must be extensively included in the curricula of basic education and general upper secondary education as well as in the degree programmes of class and subject teachers.
- Sámi content must be produced for teacher education, curricula and learning materials. (LaY, OY, OPH)

7. Education and research needs

- The Research Council of Finland must establish a Sámi Research Commission. A Sámi research integrity committee should be established in the same context. (Research Council of Finland, TENK)
- The national academic responsibilities of Sámi research and higher education at the University of Oulu and the University of Lapland must be strengthened. (OKM, OY and LaY)
- The number of Sámi speakers must be determined by means of a national study. (OM, Sámi Parliament)

8. Churches

- The recommendations outlined in the Lutheran Church's final report for the Saamelaiset kirkossa project must be implemented. (SELK)
- The revival movements within the Lutheran Church must be committed to the measures outlined in the Saamelaiset kirkossa project. (SELK)
- Together with the Skolt Sámi, the Orthodox Church must initiate discussion about its own history and present in relation to the Sámi. (SOK)
- The Orthodox Church must increase the number of Skolt Sámi-speaking people it employs. (SOK)
- Finland's churches must assume responsibly and support the rights of the Sámi in relation to the State and other societal actors in the issues raised in this report. (SELK, SOK)

9. Relations between population groups

- In order to strengthen the relationships between the Sámi and the rest of the local population in the Sámi Homeland, social dialogue should be established, the aim of which is to increase mutual trust, promote open discussion, strengthen cultural understanding and create sustainable forms of cooperation for the future. (OM, municipalities, Sámi Parliament, Skolt Saami Village Committee)
- The Government must take all measures to combat racism against the Sámi and increase knowledge and understanding of the Sámi people in all administration, official duties and education. (VN, all ministries, Sámi Parliament)

Acronyms

DVV	Digital and Population Data Services Agency
Lapha	Wellbeing services county of Lapland
LaY	University of Lapland
Luke	Natural Resources Institute Finland
LVM	Ministry of Transport and Communications
MML	National Land Survey of Finland
MMM	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
OKM	Ministry of Education and Culture
OM	Ministry of Justice
OY	University of Oulu
OPH	Finnish National Agency for Education.
PLM	Ministry of Defence
SELK	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
SM	Ministry of the Interior
SOGSAKK	Educational Centre of the Sámi Area
SOK	Finnish Orthodox Church
STM	Ministry of Social Affairs and Health
TEM	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment
TENK	Finnish National Board on Research Integrity
UM	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
VM	Ministry of Finance
VN	The Government
VNK	Prime Minister's Office
YLE	Finnish Broadcasting Company Ltd
YM	Ministry of the Environment



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