



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

UN COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

11.4.2017

**92nd session - Examination of Finland – Oral submission by the Finnish National Human Rights Institution – 26 April 2017**

**Good Morning.**

**Madam Chairperson, distinguished members of the Committee,**

My name is Leena Leikas and I represent the Finnish Human Rights Centre, part of the National Human Rights Institution in Finland.

I thank the distinguished members of the Committee and the representatives of the government of Finland for allowing this opportunity to present orally some of the views of the Finnish national human rights institution on the implementation of the CERD in Finland.

The **Finnish Human Rights Centre**, which I represent, is an autonomous and independent expert institution with a task to promote the implementation of fundamental and human rights and increase cooperation and exchange of information between various actors. The National Human Rights Institution consists of the Human Rights Centre, its pluralistic Human Rights Delegation of 20-40 expert members and the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The Institution was established by law (changes to the Law on the Parliamentary Ombudsman

535/2011), effective as of 1 January 2012. The NHRI has been accredited an A-status by the ICC (GANHRI) in December 2014. In accordance with its statutory tasks, the Human Rights Centre takes part in and represents the Finnish NHRI in international and European cooperation.

The Human Rights Centre has submitted written observations to the Committee in March 2017 as well as at the time of the midterm report in 2014. For this session, in addition to Human Rights Centre, also the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, the Sami Parliament and 3 civil society organisations have submitted observations. Those organisations are Amnesty International, Finnish League for Human Rights and Seta (an LGBTI organisation). The Universities of Tampere and Jyväskylä have also written a joint submission.

Looking through all these various submissions, one notices that the same issues keep emerging in all of them: **hate speech** and **discrimination**, rights and treatment of **foreigners and minorities**, the status and rights of **Sámi** and the lack of consultation by the government with the Sami parliament in matters concerning them.

**Madam Chairperson, members of the Committee,**

One of the most visible, increasing and disturbing issue is ***hate speech*** in political discourse, on-line and even on the streets. Hate speech incites hatred and at times leads to visible discrimination and even violence. Despite changes in legislation, increased training for authorities on the recognition of hate speech and the continuous efforts by the government, many independent ombudsmen and other actors, the civil society and individuals the situation has not improved. There is a lot of good work being done on many levels, for example in January 2017 the Ministry of Education granted close to 1 million euros for 14 local projects against hate speech and the police has increased its training and activities to cut out hate

speech. However, the visibility of hate speech and its effects keeps growing.

Another re-occurring issue is **discrimination**, both structural and individual, affecting many on the basis of disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, ethnic origin or religion, age or political views and so on. Many submissions show concern on the increase of discrimination, despite many legislative changes, new monitoring mechanisms and authorities responsible for ensuring equality and non-discrimination for all. Also concerns on sufficient funding for this work are raised.

An issue that is visible daily in the media is recent changes in the policies and legal protection for **refugees, asylum seekers and migrants** limiting their services and rights. The cumulative effects of these changes have not been considered sufficiently. These have had, among others, negative effects on unaccompanied minors, family reunification, health services for paperless persons and the asylum process in general, including forced returns.

Practically all observations make reference to various issues relating to **Sámi** as indigenous peoples, their constitutional rights to maintain and develop their culture and language and the consultation requirement in matters relating to them. The status and definition of Sámi and the clear lack of a functioning and timely used consultation procedure in matters relating to them have had a negative effect on the general image and livelihood of Sámi as well as the neighbourly relationships in the North of Finland. Many legislative changes are in the process, but many of the processes have disregarded the consultation requirement fully or partly.

As a last note, the Human Rights Centre wishes to stress the importance of **education and especially of the human rights education** at all levels and for everyone to increase inclusion and prevent hatred. In 2014 the Human Rights Centre conducted a baseline study on the implementation of human rights education and training in the Finnish education system. The

study, first of its kind, revealed lack of a systematic approach. In 2015, partly as a result of this study, human rights education was incorporated in the value basis of school, school culture and in many education subjects in the new national core curriculum for basic education, which entered into force in January 2015. In order to reach higher level of knowledge on human rights, more education and resources need to be made available for human rights education at all levels.

The Human Rights Centre avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Committee its full cooperation and assistance and the assurances of its highest consideration.

Thank you very much.