



Finnish Human Rights Centre (NHRI) – Statement at the 118th Session of the CERD Committee on 17 August 2026 for the examination of Finland

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished members of the committee and the Government delegation.

My name is Leena Leikas, and I will make a statement on behalf of the Finnish National Human Rights Institution, the Human Rights Centre. This compliments the written observations and suggested recommendations submitted by the NHRI, to the Committee earlier this year.

Finland, known as a Nordic welfare state, has an extensive **legislative framework**, thematic and general human rights action plans and a variety of policies and authorities aimed at combating racism and discrimination.

At the same time, persistent **findings by international and national human rights monitoring bodies** demonstrate the continued existence of structural racism and increasing discrimination towards national minorities, indigenous Sami people, migrants, asylum seekers or foreign citizens. There is even an **EU infringement procedure** pending for failure to implement EU legislation on anti-racism.

The challenge with all of these is the **implementation**. There is a lack of knowledge, coordination and actions between the government ministries and authorities. Human rights recommendations are discussed annually within the Government, twice so far. However, the results are somewhat unclear. The NHRI has advocated for a continuation of that discussion in the Parliament.

Structural racism and discrimination are clearly demonstrated, for example, in the **labour market and education**. The complaints received by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman as well as studies, also by the Government itself, show that equally qualified applicants with foreign-sounding names, or persons with disabilities, continue to face disadvantages in recruitment, career advancement and education. This needs further attention.

Mr. Chair,

The **social climate** in Finland has become noticeably harsher. The NHRI has

repeatedly pointed out, as has ECRI and other monitoring bodies, the increased **hate speech**, even by politicians and public figures, against women and sexual minorities, scientists, human rights activists, NGOs, disabled, unemployed and religious, linguistic or ethnic minorities. Fueled by social media trends and actions, racist and hateful speech has become more visible, more accepted and frequent in public discourse.

As a result, a high percentage of **children and young people** continue to experience discrimination in schools, public spaces, the media and online, ranging from everyday stereotyping and exclusion to harassment dismissed as humour. According to an academic [study](#), current educational steering policies do not adequately address the various forms of racism, nor do they provide clear guidance for promoting antiracism in schools. This has concrete consequences not only to educators, but especially for the mental health and wellbeing of the children and youth as well as their ability to **participate equally in society**, to feel safe, and to trust public institutions.

Mr. Chair,

The change in public climate also fuels mistrust and marginalization affecting **national security**. Currently with wars of aggression, climate crisis, arctic developments and increasing living costs, security is ever more important, as it should be. Nearly unlimited funding is allocated to security, yet severe budgetary cuts are aimed at activities to increase equality, integration, participation and belonging as well as solidarity and foreign development aid. Legislation is also enacted limiting the right to seek asylum, social benefits and health care for migrants and persons seeking asylum. Persons assumed to be foreign are, often falsely, blamed, by populist politicians and their followers, for threatening the national security, violating the women, committing crimes and living off the taxpayers' money. All this adds up.

Civil society, which is an integral part of any society and necessary for participation and advocacy, is slowly being suffocated by limiting their funds, making it harder for individuals to be heard and to influence decision making. Changes to funding criteria risk weakening organisations that possess the greatest expertise on racism and discrimination. Limiting their space, possibilities to act and ways to influence is shortsighted and unwise.

Equally, recent developments concerning **research funding**, together with

increasing hostility, intimidation and hate speech directed at researchers working on these issues, risk creating a chilling effect that ultimately weakens Finland's ability to understand and address racism effectively. Instead of evidence-based policymaking benefitting from robust and independent research the decision making does not always appear to be sufficiently grounded in independent research and evidence.

Mr Chair, distinguished committee members,

In times like these, the ability of **human rights bodies**, such as the NHRI and the ombudsmen to participate while staying independent is vital for promotion and monitoring of the human rights the State has agreed to protect and implement. The Finnish NHRI is therefore grateful for the opportunity to participate in this process. We hope the committee will stress the importance of implementation and advance human rights assessment in its recommendations.

I wish you a constructive and fruitful discussion producing strong enforceable recommendations to improve the state of human rights in Finland for all, without discrimination. Hopefully the recently published revised country brand of Finland, Making Happiness Happen, enabling people to lead a good life in a well-organised society, applies to all, despite their ethnicity, religion, language or citizenship.

Thank you.