



21 February 2014

H.E. Mr Thorbjørn Jagland
The Secretary General
of the Council of Europe

Your Excellency,

Thank you for your letter regarding the process of collecting information for the first annual report on human rights and the rule of law in Europe. It is my great pleasure to send Finland's input in response to the three specific issues you have raised in relation to Finland's main human right challenges based on the observations and recommendations of the Council of Europe monitoring bodies.

The three issues raised by you included discrimination against Sámi minority; issues related to detention conditions; and violence against women. All these issues are indeed topical and deserve our attention. In response to your letter I have requested the relevant authorities to submit information on the improvements that have taken place and the issues that still need to be addressed in order to comply with the recommendations received from the monitoring bodies.

Although certainly some further work is required there has been positive progress related to the indigenous Sámi people's land rights that you raised in your analysis. A process to prepare legislation increasing the participation right of the Sámi people in the decision-making procedures for issues related to the use of land and water areas has been initiated.

As regards the prevention of violence against women I am happy to inform you that Finland signed the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) in May 2011. We have also organised activities to raise awareness regarding the Convention and to promote its swift ratification. In January 2012, the Council of Europe and Finland organised a regional conference on the Istanbul Convention.

Let me say that I highly appreciate the active role you have taken in promoting the compliance of Council of Europe Member States with their human rights obligations.

I find your initiative excellent in order to further advance the follow-up to and implementation of the findings of the Council of Europe monitoring bodies. The process is useful both in terms of the support it renders to the effective functioning of the independent monitoring mechanisms and more systematic use of their findings and in focusing our attention on the key human rights challenges in the Council of Europe Member States. It is important that the States Parties to treaties are encouraged to follow up on the recommendations that they have received from the monitoring bodies. We all have our challenges when it comes to human rights. Discussing these challenges openly, sharing good practices and learning from each other is therefore most useful for all of us.

As regards the protection of human rights, I would like to emphasize the unique role of national human rights institutions in monitoring the implementation of human rights, identifying and investigating alleged violations of human rights and providing a remedy and redress for victims, including by ensuring greater respect for the rule of law. Discussions on the state of human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Europe would be greatly enriched by input from national stakeholders, such as national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations. Our own national experience shows that multistakeholder processes bring diversity and are useful in a number of ways for seeking innovative approaches to the better realization of the human rights.

We firmly support your efforts to ensure that the Council of Europe concentrates on its core functions, i.e. promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The annual report is a novelty and an inspiring example of how our common working methods can be further improved. We are very much looking forward to your annual report and discussing it in the Committee of Ministers in May.

Yours sincerely,



Erkki Tuomioja

Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Attachments: Finnish contribution in response to the identified three key challenges