



PUBLISHABLE

9.8.2024

Today is the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, a day dedicated to recognizing the world's cultural diversity and Indigenous cultures. We remind that not all Indigenous peoples are still treated equally in Finland.

FOREST SÁMI FACE SEVERE DISCRIMINATION

In spring 2024, the Cooperative Organization of the Indigenous Sámi of Finland, the Parliament of the Sámi Villages, conducted a survey on the discrimination experienced by Forest Sámi. The results were surprising.

Nearly all respondents (95%) reported experiencing discrimination related to their Forest Sámi identity.

Half of the respondents said they had experienced discrimination on social media. The discrimination manifests as hate speech, belittlement, contempt, bullying, and dismissiveness. The very existence of Forest Sámi culture is denied — without any knowledge or justification. For example, it has been claimed that Forest Sámi are an invented tribe, mythical creatures, or fake. In addition, defamatory memes and videos have been made, and mockery has been directed at Forest Sámi cultural traditions, clothing, *livđđe* (traditional yoik), and language.

For many, the discrimination has caused emotional distress, anxiety, fearfulness, and insecurity. One respondent said: “What hurts the most is seeing children have to face this.” Another commented: “Every single discriminatory comment gets under my skin. My body is under constant stress — like someone being bullied at school or work.”

Some have decided to give up their identity due to the ongoing pressure. One person even grimly joked about needing therapy. Criminal reports have been filed.

Nearly all respondents (81%) reported experiencing discrimination from other Sámi individuals or from the Sámi Parliament. Other sources of discrimination (37%) mentioned included authorities such as the judiciary, police, ministries, civil servants, and the media. Discriminatory behavior was also reported from relatives and schools. Metsähallitus (the Finnish Forest Administration) was identified as discriminating against Forest Sámi, as was the University of Lapland. The church was also seen as failing to recognize Forest Sámi.

“In today’s world, the use of disinformation as a tool of influence has increased,” says Merja Mattila, Chair of the Parliament of the Sámi Villages.

Researchers who align themselves with the ideology of the Sámi Parliament have begun introducing new racist terms, such as “neo-Lapps”, and refer to Forest Sámi identity as a



made-up phenomenon. “This amounts to the denial and erasure of the history of Sámi people belonging to Finland’s Indigenous population — namely the Forest Sámi and Inari Sámi.”

Page 2 / 2
8.8.2024

A visible form of discrimination is the denial of voting rights to Forest Sámi. Going forward, all Sámi people should be treated equally — with equal rights before the law and within Sámi society. The Sámi Parliament, which exercises public authority, cannot disregard Finnish legislation and its provisions by appealing to customary law. The Sámi Parliament directs discrimination toward the Indigenous Forest and Inari Sámi populations. It abuses public authority, for example, by removing individuals belonging to the Indigenous people from the electoral roll in violation of legally binding decisions by the Supreme Administrative Court (KHO).

HUMAN RIGHTS ARE INDIVISIBLE AND THEY BELONG TO EVERYONE

The Forest and Inari Sámi are Sámi belonging to the Indigenous people as defined in Section 3, paragraph 2 of the Sámi Parliament Act, and as recognized as an Indigenous people under Section 17(3) of the Finnish Constitution. They are descendants of Forest Lapp (*metsälappalainen*) families listed in historical land, tax, or census records, whose grandparents spoke *Lappish* (meaning the Sámi language). The Forest and Inari Sámi, as part of the Indigenous population, are among the oldest Sámi groups to have lived in the region of Lapland. Their origins can be verified through documentation dating back at least to the 1500s.

“Finnish law recognizes the Forest and Inari Sámi in its definition of Sámi,” says Merja Mattila.

“That same law grants the Sámi Parliament the role of representing all Sámi people. Contrary to Section 6 of the Sámi Parliament Act, the Sámi Parliament denies the identity and ethnicity of the Forest and Inari Sámi, as well as their right and freedom to fully belong to the Sámi people. This is a serious violation of human rights, targeting a part of the Sámi population that is limited by ancestry. In this, the Forest and Inari Sámi people survive — but their cultural capital is being destroyed, and their rights and freedoms as defined in human rights treaties are being violated.”

Merja Mattila, Master of Laws, Parliament of Sámi villages in Finland, Chairman

+358 400 391003 merja.mattila@metsasaamelaiset.fi

<https://www.metsasaamelaiset.fi/> <https://www.yksineljasta.fi/>