

Why Do Forest and Inari Sámi Seek Inclusion in the Sámi Parliament Electoral Roll?

The Sámi Parliament is a body exercising public authority and operating with government funding as an advocacy organization. According to section 6 of the Sámi Parliament Act, it is obliged to represent all Sámi. It does not fulfill this duty but instead discriminates against Forest and Inari Sámi who belong to the Indigenous people.

Originally, when Sámi self-government was being considered, the intention was that all Sámi groups in Finland would be included in the established Sámi Parliament. The committee report 1973:46 shows that the *Lapinkylät* (Sámi villages) were intended to be part of Sámi governance. We are now in a situation where the Sámi Parliament is moving to remove the so-called “Lapp criterion,” section 3, subsection 2, from the current Sámi Parliament Act. This would mean the loss of legal protection for the descendants of Forest and Inari Sámi who are listed as “Lapp” in historical land, taxation, and census records.

Forest and Inari Sámi, as members of the Indigenous people, have the right to participate in decision-making concerning their own affairs within a Sámi representative body. The descendants of the Sámi village Lapps—that is, the Forest and Inari Sámi—hold land-use rights and special traditional rights to land and water. They are the holders of the old Lapp rights. It is contradictory that through the amendment of the Sámi Parliament Act, the Sámi Parliament is attempting to appropriate these land-use rights. For the Forest and Inari Sámi, this is about defending existing rights and freedoms.

All citizens residing in the Sámi homeland area have the right to freely engage in any livelihood. The amendment to the Sámi Parliament Act is creating an autonomous Sámi governance system, under which the Sámi Parliament would claim dominant decision-making power over all livelihoods that utilize natural resources. In this context as well, the Forest and Inari Sámi are defending the freedom of livelihoods and entrepreneurship. Examples include tourism, hunting, fishing, reindeer husbandry—essentially, the traditional livelihoods practiced in the North.

The Sámi Parliament has already begun to strengthen its anticipated autonomous position, even though the law is still under legislative consideration. The Sámi Parliament is negotiating with authorities with the aim of securing outcomes that satisfy only their interests. As a result of these negotiations, “ethical guidelines” for tourism and university research have been introduced, as well as a cooperation agreement with Metsähallitus (Forestry Board).

The power holders in the Sámi Parliament, who are North Sámi, are engaged in a power struggle to monopolize Sámi identity and to marginalize others in Northern Finnish society (a reference to self-governance and the Sámi Parliament Act reform).

We do not ask for more, nor do we accept less—we demand an equal society.

Suomen alkuperäisten saamelaisten yhteistyöjärjestö ry – Parliament of Sámi villages in Finland

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