

Speech by Mr. Janne Saijets , from the Central Organization of the Sámi

Thank you chair, Mr. Secretary-General, ladies and gentlemen,

One of the most severe human rights violations in Finland is that the state does not recognize the Sami people's rights to land, even though the Sami are recognized in the Finnish Constitution as an indigenous people.

Finland has not ratified the ILO-169 convention contrary to many promises made by the government. Neither the traditional land ownership nor land use rights of the Sámi people have been recognized by the Finnish state. The most severe dispute – as a result of this nonratification of ILO – is the many decades long dispute of state forest loggings in the Sámi home region. Loggings destroy important grazing areas of traditional reindeer herding which is one of the most important livelihoods of the Sámi people. Basically one can claim that anything that threatens reindeer herding is a serious threat to Sámi culture and language. This is something Finnish state officials never take seriously but considers it as rhetoric. In addition to forest loggings Sámi land is used against the will of Sámi people for mining, tourism, new road constructions among other things and the ground for these destructive activities is that the lands are owned by the Finnish state.

The climate change is another serious threat to the traditional Sámi livelihoods as they are based on nature. Models predict warm autumns and a lot of snow in spring time which also has been the trend in the last 15 years. This can be very destructive for example to reindeer herding. Herding maybe become difficult if the rivers, lakes and swamps are free of ice in autumn time and grazing may become difficult in spring time due to the thick snow cover.

We are living crucial times when decisions have to be made. The Sámi people, language and culture are about to be lost if these issues will not be taken seriously.

We, Sami people highly value / appreciate your work in climate change, especially the way you have included indigenous peoples in the struggle against climate change.