

Barents EamiálbmogiidLávdegoddi

Arbeidsgruppen for urfolk i Barentsregionen

Рабочая Группа по Коренным Народам Баренцева региона

The **W**orking **G**roup of **I**ndigenous **P**eoples in BEAR



Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Division for Social Policy and Development
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Room: S-2958
United Nations Headquarters
New York, USA 10017

Girkonjárga, December 31 2015

Response to the questionnaire to Indigenous Peoples' Organizations

Dear Madam,

On behalf of the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (WGIP), I would like to express gratitude for being able to contribute to the Permanent Forum's fifteenth session, and for the interest in the situation for indigenous peoples in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.

1. Working Group of Indigenous Peoples in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (WGIP), based in Norway, Finland, Sweden and the Russian Federation.
The WGIP secretariat consists of two employees at the Norwegian Barents Secretariat in Kirkenes (Norway) and Barents Indigenous Peoples' Office in Murmansk (Russian Federation).
2. The purpose of the WGIP is to serve as a forum for indigenous peoples' cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, hereinafter referred to as BEAR, (comprising parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and The Russian Federation), and to ensure the involvement of the BEAR indigenous peoples in decision-making processes and their participation in the cooperation.

The overall goal for the indigenous peoples' cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region is to secure indigenous peoples' rights, foundation for trade, society, culture and language through implementation of the Action Plan of Indigenous Peoples of the BEAR. The indigenous peoples' cooperation shall contribute to friendship and cooperation based on equality, co-existence and tolerance between the peoples of the region. In the light of Nenets, Saami and Veps' status as indigenous peoples of the north, the cooperation shall secure solid health- and living conditions, as well as cultural continuity, in the future.

The WGIP was appointed by the Barents Regional Council and was established on a permanent basis in 1995. WGIP has an advisory status towards the Barents Regional Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC). By this, the WGIP has a particular political dimension within the formal structure of the Barents cooperation.

3. The WGIP consists of 6 members appointed by

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- The Sámi Parliamentary Council (3 Sámi representatives inhabiting Norway, Sweden and Finland), for a four-year period (coherent with the election period of the Parliaments)
- The Sámi Congress of Murmansk Oblast (1 Sámi representative inhabiting the Russian Federation)
- The Regional Public Movement “ Association of the Nenets People”, Yasavey (1 Nenets representative inhabiting the Russian Federation)
- The Veps Culture Society (1 Veps representative inhabiting the Russian Federation).

The three members appointed by organizations in the Russian Federation are appointed for a three-year period.

The current Chair is Ms Christina Henriksen, Member of the Sámi Parliament in Norway and the observers to the WGIP are RAIPON, Sámi Women’s Forum, Saami Council and Gáldu – Resource Centre for Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

4. WGIP participated in the 10th session of the UNPFII. On 19 May 2011, the WGIP arranged a side event together with RAIPON on the Democratization processes among Indigenous Peoples in the Russian Federation. Ms Valentina Sovkina spoke on behalf of the WGIP and Ms Anna Naykanchina spoke on behalf of RAIPON. WGIP Chairperson, Lars-Anders Baer chaired the event. The Sámi member from the Russian side participated in the UNPFII session (first week), as well as the two secretaries.
5. The UNPFII does not directly support any WGIP activities as of today. However, the UNPFII secretariat assisted the WGIP in preparations for the 2011 side event, an the previous UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Dr James Anaya, was keynote speaker at the Second Barents Indigenous Peoples’ Congress in 2012, on the topic of indigenous peoples’ rights and corporations in the seminar held the day before the congress.
6. Indigenous peoples’ organizations, and indigenous politicians, in the Russian Federation have experiences certain challenges regarding implementation of international cooperation and participation in international indigenous peoples’ events. These issues are regularly reported on and discussed with federal authorities of the Member States of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, within the framework of the Council. The WGIP are permanent members of the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO), which meets approximately 4 times a year.

The Barents Indigenous Peoples’ Congress (BIPC) has been implemented three times up until now, and serves as an arena for political discussions between delegates from all appointing parliaments and organizations. The BIPC adopts a resolution, addressing state and regional authorities on indigenous peoples’ matters.

Representatives of state and regional authorities are invited to the congress, as well as

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other cooperation partners and/or organizations or others whose activities or policy affect indigenous peoples in the BEAR.

Regarding indigenous women, it is rather obvious that indigenous women play a significant part in the political sphere in our region, as the majority of the current WGIP representatives are women. Indigenous women have high political positions, as the Sámi Parliaments in Finland and Norway are chaired by women (as of December 2015), the Veps Cultural Society is chaired by a woman, whereas the remaining participating organizations are led by men. The Sámi Womens' Forum is an observer to the WGIP and is invited to take part in all meetings and preparations of documents, such as the BIPC Resolutions.

7. The A/RES/69/2

- a. The WGIP participated in the WCIP Preparation Conference in Alta in June 2013. Other than that, the UNDRIP serves as an important document for the WGIP activities and is certainly an important reference in the documents.
- b. All four national states must be said to have challenges regarding the implementation of the UNDRIP, here are some examples from three of them:
 - In **Finland**, there have been serious tensions between the State of Finland and the Sámi Parliament this last year. In Spring 2015, after years of negotiations regarding the ratification of ILO convention No 169 and revision of the Sámi Act, Finland refused to revise the Sámi Act, and ignored the treaty made with the Sámi Parliament. Furthermore, Finland did not ratify the ILO Convention No 169, as agreed. Just before the election of the Sámi Parliament, the Finnish Supreme Administrative Court overruled the Sámi Parliament decisions regarding the inclusion of individuals to the election roll. The WGIP considers it evident that there is a need for Finland and the Sámi Parliament to rebuild trust for the sake of the Sámi people.
 - **Norway** is the only Barents state that has ratified the ILO Convention No. 169, and the Agreement on procedures for consultation between the Norwegian Government and the Sámi Parliament in Norway has existed for ten years. According to the ILO Convention No. 169, indigenous peoples are entitled to be consulted on matters that affect us. Unfortunately, the Norwegian Government has broken this agreement too often lately, in particular regarding issues of education and fishery management. The Working Group of Indigenous Peoples regrets that, and sees room for improvement and clarification of the procedures, so that consultations can be implemented according to the intentions.
 - The WGIP is worried about the situation for indigenous peoples' NGOs in the **Russian Federation**, and in particular the effects, which the Russian Federal Agent Law may have on the development and continuation of the Barents cooperation. Yasavey Manzara is the

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branch of the Nenets organization Yasavey that has implemented successful cooperation projects involving indigenous peoples of the Arctic. This branch was registered as “foreign agent” in Autumn 2015 and decided to seize all activities as a consequence. Among the strengths of the Barents Region is the diversity of people, of cultures and of individuals and organisations eager to develop their own community and our common region, and this matter has been put forward by the WGIP to Russian authorities through the BEAC framework.

- c. The WGIP is not directly involved in collection and dissemination of disaggregated data or culturally relevant data on indigenous peoples.
8. The WGIP bases its work on the UNDRIP principles and it is a crucial background document for the BIPC Resolutions and the discussions in the Congress.
9. The WGIP provides and participates in capacity building through cooperation with other indigenous peoples’ organizations in projects and through the implementation of the Action Plan of Indigenous Peoples (the latest adopted by the 3rd Barents Indigenous Peoples Congress in Tromsø, Norway on February 4 2015).
10. Currently, there is no formal contact between the WGIP and the UN, and the support has not extended beyond what has been mentioned above.
11. In 2016 and 2017, the WGIP will hold its regular meetings and participate in all CSO meetings held by the Russian Chairmanship, as well as all other relevant meetings. According to the priorities of the Russian Chair of the BEAC (2015-2017), the Russian Federation is to host an indigenous peoples’ meeting during the chairmanship, and the WGIP will be the dialogue partner for the shaping and planning of this event, which might take place in 2017. In the light of these mentioned priorities, the WGIP has launched the idea of cooperating with the Russian chairmanship on a side event at the fifteenth UNPFII session. Yet, time is running and we will of course contact the Secretariat of the UNPFII as soon as the plan is further developed.

Please feel free to contact the WGIP if you have any further questions, the WGIP is happy to contribute to the work of the UNPFII.

Kind regards,

Christina Henriksen

WGIP Chair

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