



**PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY
TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF
THE SAMI PEOPLE'S DAY**

Delivered by Minister Counsellor Henning Hj. Johansen at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 8 February 2018

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Mr. Chair,

On Tuesday, 6 February, we celebrated the Sami People's Day. The Sami people are the indigenous people mainly inhabiting the Arctic area of Sápmi, which today encompasses parts of northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia. There is an estimated total population of between 50 000 and 80 000 Sami People, with a majority of approximately 40 000 living in Norway.

The occasion of the Sami People's Day reminds us of the discrimination against the Sami People during the consolidation of modern Norway. Towards the end of the 19th century, the Norwegian state introduced a policy of assimilation of the Sami people and other ethnic minorities. As a result, many Sami families and societies came to reject their own Sami identity and lose their command of the Sami language.

Not until after World War 2, did a more positive view of the Sami minority begin to dominate Norwegian public life. Crucially, new international ideas about human dignity and minority rights influenced the authorities and paved the way for a new policy.

In the 1980s several public reports were produced concerning Sami rights, with active participation from Sami civil society. This work culminated in the Sami Act of 1987, which provided for special rights for the Sami People, including the establishment of a Sami parliament.

In 1997, His Majesty the King, Harald V, apologised on behalf of the Norwegian government for serious violations against the Sami people. Since then, the Norwegian Constitution has been revised to guarantee the right of the Sami people to develop their language, culture and society. The Finnmark Act of 2005 helps secure a material basis for Sami culture.

The most recent milestone in the efforts to promote the development of Sami culture and society in Norway was reached on 20 June 2017. Following several years of debate around the possible establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission in Norway, the Norwegian Parliament decided to establish a commission to examine Norway's former assimilation policy. The Parliament will work closely with the stakeholders, both Sami and of the Kven national minority, on the mandate and composition of the commission.

Though the commission is expected to work for several years, we cannot wait to act until its work is finished; we will continue to safeguard the interests of the Sami and our national minorities as the commission sets about its work.

Mr Chair,

Despite significant progress for the rights of indigenous peoples and national minorities, both nationally and in our region, there is still prejudice against the Sami People and national minorities. The Sami People's Day is a celebration, but also an occasion to remind ourselves of the injustices of the past. We must ensure that they are never repeated. Let this occasion encourage us to use our organisation to promote tolerance and non-discrimination, and fight prejudices wherever we may find them.

Thank you.