



**PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY
TO THE OSCE**

STATEMENT ON THE SAMI PEOPLE'S DAY

Delivered by Minister Counsellor Henning Hj. Johansen at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 7 February 2019

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Chair,

Yesterday, 6 February, was 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.

While the Sami People's Day is a cause for celebration, it also reminds us of the discrimination against the Sami People during the consolidation of modern Norway. Toward 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 languages. Not until the 1970s, did a more positive view of the Sami begin to dominate Norwegian public life. In large part due to growing, international recognition of minority rights.

The Sami Act of 1987 provided for special rights for the Sami People, including the establishment of a Sami parliament. In 1997, King Harald V recognized that Norway is founded on the territory of two nations, the Norwegian and the Sami, and he apologised for the wrongs previously committed during assimilation. Since then, the Sami people have been granted a constitutional right to develop their language, culture and society. The Finnmark Act of 2005 helps secure a material basis for Sami culture.

On 20 June 2017, the Norwegian Parliament decided to establish a commission to examine Norway's former assimilation policy. Its mandate and composition has been determined in close consultation with the Sami parliament and relevant minority organisations. The commission is expected to deliver its report in 2022, but we cannot

wait until then to act. We will continue to safeguard the interests of the Sami and our national minorities as the commission works.

Despite continuing efforts to strengthen Sami rights and institutions, individual cases of disagreement, or even dispute, can occur. Therefore, consultations between the Sami people and national authorities are key to mutual knowledge and understanding. They are essential for reaching agreement when Sami interests are involved. To strengthen this dialogue further, the Norwegian government has proposed to extend the scope of consultations and to give them a statutory basis. A bill to this end is currently under consideration in parliament.

The Sami People's Day is a celebration reminding us of the great gains in rights for our indigenous people. Still, we must remember the injustices of the past, so that we may never repeat them. As such, let this occasion encourage us to use the OSCE to promote tolerance and non-discrimination, and fight prejudice wherever we may find it.

Thank you.