

Sámi youths' declaration on climate change

This is the declaration of the Nordic Sámi Youth Conference which took place on the 23rd of August 2021. The declaration has been prepared by the youth councils of the Sámi parliaments of Finland, Sweden and Norway. The declaration has been worked on at the conference and has been finalised by the youth councils. This declaration works as an operational model for Sámi youth across borders and against climate change.

We recognise the ongoing climate crisis and the need to take action. We as indigenous peoples face the consequences first and the worst. We already see the impacts in our languages, livelihoods and traditional lands. Arctic indigenous peoples experience climate change most drastically as the climate is warming twice as fast in the Arctic. Sámi youth are worried about the impacts of climate change on the traditional livelihoods and culture of the Sámi people.

We Sámis are one nation inside four states. We have our own history, way of life and the right to self-governance. We also have the right to economic, social and cultural progress which is based on our way of life and values. We highlight that cooperation between Sámi youth needs to be secured with mutual events and gatherings. We also highlight that cooperation between Sámis across state borders and with other indigenous peoples needs to be prioritised.

“If I would lose the Sámi language, it would cut a big part of my life away. With some friends it’s the only language of communication.”

According to our traditional beliefs everything is connected to everything. These mutual issues pointed out need to be seen as one and not separately. We highlight that, contrary to general belief, our issues are not just cultural but also social. We demand that our siblings’

rights in the Russian side of Sápmi are improved and their rights to their mother tongue, culture and social action are secured.

The traditional Sámi way of life includes a connection to nature and the need to protect it. We Sámis have lived in nature and from nature from time immemorial. Our traditions also include respect for nature and we only take what is needed from it. Traditional Sámi lands are in a primary position for language revitalisation, maintaining traditional knowledge and implementing self-governance. We highlight that these lands need to be secured for traditional livelihoods. This will give us the opportunity to protect these lands from environmentally harmful land use and keep our languages and culture alive.

“I just go running in the forest. I couldn't do that if there wasn't fresh air or some mining or something.”

Our elders hold a significant amount of our traditional knowledge and it needs to be collected. We have the right to learn their skills and traditions that have not been passed down to us. They also have a strong connection to the land that needs to be passed down to the future generations. We see the importance of governments funding possibilities to pass on traditional knowledge, but also possibilities for it being collected.

We demand lifting traditional knowledge as an equal reference when studying and discussing climate change, land acknowledgment and traditional livelihoods.

“I've learned many practical skills from my parents, grandparents and by working with community members and traditional livelihoods.”

Indigenous peoples protect 80 percent of the biodiversity in the world. We recognise the interest in our lands for transitioning away from fossil fuel energy as wind power and hydroelectric companies find our land suitable for their energy production. This is at the expense of the indigenous peoples around the world and their traditional land and will only lessen the little wildlife left.

A third of the earth's carbon is in northern swamps, peat and old-growth forests. The old-growth forests in Sápmi are important carbon sinks. The hanging lichen and old forests are also crucial for reindeer. We demand that loggings in these forests end and the forests are protected while Sámi rights are respected and Sámi are included in decision-making.

As our culture lives through nature and the environment, we demand that the mining and energy companies restore nature to its original state. We demand stricter laws to control these companies' actions and to truly implement self-governance. We do not accept that these companies merely inform us about their plans. We demand equal negotiations and the right to decline the projects.

There are many ongoing and temporarily beaten colonial (non-consensual) projects such as the Nussir mining company dumping their waste in Riehpovuotna, windmill plans in Trøndelag and

Rástegaisa in Norway, huge mining reservations in Enontekiö, Ivalo and Vuotso and governmental company Svea Skoge cutting old forest for example in Luokta-Mávas and Muonio Sámi villages in Sweden. We demand immediate suspension of these projects.

“Well it's really bad if the mines come to the forests, then reindeer herding and the whole Sámi way of life would be gone.”

“Of course it matters, thinking about all the waste and how water would be destroyed.”

We Sámi youth acknowledge the recent IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) reports, especially the Special Reports on 1.5°C Degrees Warming and SROCC, as well as the 2021 IPCC WG1 AR6 report published in August 2021. The results draw an image of the Northern Indigenous homelands. Species critical to our survival and cultural preservation, such as reindeer, Arctic char and other salmonid fish, the Arctic fox and northern flora will become under extreme stress, potentially extinct in the next decades if the present course continues. A system change is now under way in our area, for the worse. Based on these scientific assessments, we demand immediate and equitable action for the Northern Indigenous peoples and the Sámi homeland especially - home of unique cultures, species and ecosystems. A loss here is a loss forever. The realisation of Indigenous rights,

inclusion of Sámi knowledge in climate decisions and observations and the creation of safe zones for preserved intact landscapes combined with indigenous-led rewilding and restoration of already degraded habitats are urgently needed.

We demand immediate action against the climate crisis regarding the issues raised in the IPCC report. We have talked about the consequences of climate change and the impacts our community has been facing for years. We are not in a position to reduce the impacts and we need to start integration for our culture, languages and livelihoods to survive. As the IPCC report gives brutal facts about the climate crisis, we demand that governments take the report seriously and listen to the science. Science is on our side.

We demand that we are equally involved in conversations regarding climate change at a national and international level as expert speakers and knowledge holders. We deserve reserved seats at negotiation tables and work groups. We demand concrete action and our own mechanisms to the laws to get the necessary support as we integrate to climate change.

We demand that governments commit to carbon neutrality and to the emission reductions pointed out by the IPCC. Government action should not weaken Sámi youths' livelihoods and culture. Before our lands have been sacrificed to be exploited and ruined but now the land is demanded to be used in green colonialism for actions against climate change. We will not take responsibility for climate change and sacrifice our culture and land for these actions as we are not responsible for the need of the actions.

We agree that the Sámis who use our lands and waters traditionally have the right to them. We highlight that traditional Sámi livelihoods are a crucial part of our culture. It is important for us to have access to these lands and waters as a huge part of our culture and identity is connected to them. Our ownership of these needs to be secured. We have the will to protect these lands and waters from competing land usage.

We recognise our traditional livelihoods - reindeer herding, fishing, hunting and gathering - as strong identity builders and traditional knowledge holders. The practitioners of traditional livelihoods must be supported and embraced. We are extremely worried about the

already visible impacts of climate change on the traditional livelihoods and the whole culture.

Reindeer grazing reduces the impacts of climate change. Reindeer eat the tundra plants and this reduces the shrubs and more sunlight is reflected into space. Because of climate change there are more parasites in reindeer. Unstable weather causes difficulties in reindeer herding and increases the risk of accidents. Because of increasingly changing weather the snow and ice covers are not as predictable as they used to be and the ice cover keeps reindeer from getting food and causes starvation. We hope that the vehicles that are used in Sámi livelihoods would be developed in a more low-emission way to be less polluting.

As the temperature of our atmosphere increases and the waters become warmer, it affects the fish species. We are worried that invasive species are spreading to the northern areas - for example the introduced Pink Salmon and new different kind of insects. We are worried that the system change under way is undermining the very foundations of northern nature: the treeline is moving up and further north and aquatic temperatures of over 24 threaten immediate extinction of cold water adapted fish, such as Arctic Char, trout, grayling and other species. Proliferation of invasive species demonstrates a capacity to replace the endemic species of our home areas. We are worried that waters are drying out, the lakes are getting smaller, algae is spreading and microplastic is found also in Sápmi waters. We recognise the injustice of the Deatnu river contract which violates the indigenous rights of the local Sámi community. We demand that this injustice is corrected and damage to the community is compensated. We also demand actions to restore and pass on traditional knowledge about fishing in every part of Sápmi through conversation across borders.

“We get good fish from our home shore.”

Duodji is a livelihood that keeps us connected to our community, culture and way of life. Duodji is made personally for every individual and it tells members of the community for example where they are from. We recognise that duodji is dependent of our other livelihoods as

some of the materials are collected from reindeer and fish. As the climate is changing, also

the ways and the amount of time in a year to use duodji change. This means that parts of the duodji are disappearing. We demand actions to collect knowledge of duodji to secure that the tradition and knowledge is passed on to next generations.

We recognise our traditional joik rising as it is no longer demonised by the church. More people are learning their families' joiks and receive income through it. We need more possibilities for people to present their talents in communal gatherings and smaller arenas but also professionally.

Language holds a huge place in a person's identity and in the community. We recognise that every Sámi child has the right to learn their mother tongue. We also recognise the needs of the youth and adults who have lost their language, but are breaking generational traumas and learning their mother language. Language rights relate directly to traditional livelihoods and handicraft, because if we lose the connection to these, we also lose our language.

We also have words that cannot be described in other languages. We are worried about climate change impacting our language as words for snow and other words for nature can disappear from our vocabulary. Sámi youths need to be supported and encouraged to speak their mother language.

Sámi youth have the right to use Sámi language in non-official settings, but also when communicating with officials. Sámi language education needs to be recognised as equal to other language studies as we have our indigenous right to speak, learn and use our mother language. We demand a huge increase in the funding of Sámi education and services.

“We use the Sámi language on social media but also while playing video games.”

We need more professionals educated in culturally sensitive mental health services but also more Sámi professionals so that our youth do not need to explain what they are feeling and going through. Sámi youths have the right to high quality, culturally and linguistically appropriate help and services as they go through multigenerational trauma and the anxiety of

impacts of climate change. Mental health and overall health services should be safe, accessible and available also outside of Sápmi. Data on the services and issues needs to be



collected consistently. We also need education inside our community about the challenges and rights of the rainbow Sámi who are a minority inside a minority.

We believe that every Sámi youth has not only the right to use the Sámi language on social media but should also feel safe doing so. We demand actions against the hate speech and discrimination that Sámis face on social media and other media on a daily basis. We demand more education about

Sámis for the main population as it is tightly connected to the hate speech we receive. The effects of racism and hate speech against Sámis are not studied well enough and often the government laws do not recognise the hate speech which is shown in stereotypes, land rights, self-determination, cultural and language rights. The existing racism towards us Sámi peoples tends to limit the youths' willingness to participate in the traditions and keep the culture alive.

Reindeer herders receive hate speech from the main population but also from our own community. We find this very alarming as this leads to high suicide rates among reindeer herders but also to animal abuse against reindeer. We demand action against the discrimination reindeer herders face from the police. We also need education for the veterinarians who are needed to treat sick or injured reindeer.

“Covid has impacted my Sámi language speaking as I haven't seen my friends in two years. We miss seeing each other.”

Lastly we would like to state that we have the right to a future and it needs to be formed by us for us. Arenas and communal gatherings where we get to discuss timely topics and form mutual opinions are highly important. These gatherings are crucial for our future and the well-being of our youth. As we have seen throughout the Covid pandemic, we are easily isolated from each other by governments. We demand actions for the future so that this will never happen again. As we stated in the beginning: we are one nation in four countries. And we will not allow the borders to tear us apart.

Ellos Sápmi! Long Live Sápmi! Leve Sápmi! Eläköön Sápmi!