

UN expert on Indigenous Peoples concludes visit to the traditional region of the Sami peoples

“I am grateful to the Sami Parliaments of Norway, Sweden and Finland and to the Nordic Governments for their participation in this important conference on cross-border issues that affect the Sami people” stated James Anaya, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, as he concluded his three day mission to the Sápmi region, the traditional territory of the Sami people. The Special Rapporteur also expressed his gratitude to the Sami Parliamentary Council for their help organizing the visit and to the Government of Finland for hosting the conference in Rovaniemi, Finland.

During his visit, the Special Rapporteur had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the Sami people, including the Sami Parliaments and the Governments of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, as well as with non-governmental organizations from the Sápmi region. The Special Rapporteur stated that “I hope that this novel visit will be regarded as a good practice for addressing the human rights concerns of indigenous peoples that continue to live within their traditional territories spanning the formal boundaries of several States.”

Upon concluding his visit, the Special Rapporteur noted that “I am encouraged by the commitment of all participations and note with a good deal of satisfaction the progress that has already been made in advancing the human rights of indigenous peoples within the region”. Nevertheless, he affirmed that “the challenges ahead in Sápmi are no doubt significant, and to meet them requires serious commitment, political will, and hard work.”

During the conference, the Special Rapporteur examined key issues affecting Sami people across the Sápmi region, including in relation to their right to self-determination; rights to land, water, and natural resources; and issues involving children and youth, including education and language. The Special Rapporteur intends to draft a report with his observations and recommendations on central issues, which he hopes will help advance solutions to ongoing challenges, while building on relevant progress and good practices already achieved.