

Effective Political Participation

I thank you for this opportunity to present the work in Norway when it comes to implementing the right to effective participation for minorities. Participation in decision-making processes is of fundamental importance for the realization of a number of minority rights.

Minority groups in Norway are protected by different international legal instruments, depending on whether the group is regarded as indigenous peoples, national minorities or immigrants. This presentation will focus on indigenous peoples and national minorities. The Sami people are recognized as an indigenous people under the ILO Convention No 169 concerning indigenous and tribal peoples. Five groups in Norway are considered as national minorities under the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. These are Jews, Roma, Romani people/Tater, Kvens and Forest Finns.

There are established various forms of dialogue between the minority groups and the authorities in Norway. In order to empower the minorities as a dialogue partner, public grants are given to self organization and to minority institutions.

The right to co-determination and consultation is a central element in the ILO Convention No 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The ILO Convention No 169 article 6 states that indigenous peoples have the right to consultation in matters that may directly affect them. In 2005, the Government of Norway and the Sami Parliament (Samediggi) in Norway agreed on consultation procedures between Samediggi and the State Authorities. The procedures have led to increased awareness of the duty to consult throughout the state apparatus. From January 2008 through May 2009, formalized consultations have taken place in 40 different cases, resulting in an agreement in all but a few.

Regarding the national minorities, the situation is more complex. They are not a homogenous group and the various national minorities face a number of different challenges in areas of society today.

In recent years, the Norwegian authorities have made efforts to develop a coherent, inclusive policy for national minorities in Norway. The Contact Forum between the national minorities and the authorities was established in 2003 to meet the right to effective participation laid down in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (art 15). Because of the various interests among the national minorities, it is challenging to make the dialogue in the Forum fruitful for all groups. Some topics must rather be brought into a bilateral dialogue between the minority group and state authorities.

Examples of topics being discussed bilaterally are the Romani people/Tater culture fund, the Plan of action to improve the living conditions for the Roma in Oslo with Norwegian citizenship and the criteria for financial support to minority non-governmental organizations and support for projects relevant to national minorities.

I will end my presentation by underlining the responsibility of the authorities for developing the framework conditions for a fruitful and effective dialogue with the minority groups.