

## **Land and resource rights are key to Sami people's self-determination, UN rights expert says**

HEMAVAN / GENEVA (28 August 2015) – The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, today expressed concern at the land rights situation of the Sami people in Finland, Norway and Sweden, given the increased drive to extract and develop minerals and set up renewable energy projects in the Sápmi region.

"For the Sami people, securing rights over their land and natural resources is fundamental to their self-determination and a prerequisite for them to be able to continue to exist as a distinct people," the human rights expert said at the end of a special conference organized by the Sami Parliamentary Council and hosted in Hemavan, Sweden from August 25-27.

Ms. Tauli-Corpuz's participation at the conference was considered an official visit to the traditional region of the Sami people, who continue to live within their territories spanning the formal boundaries of several States.

"I am pleased that Norway, Sweden and Finland all pay considerable attention to indigenous issues and note that in many respects, initiatives related to the Sami people in the Nordic countries can set important examples for securing the rights of indigenous peoples," she said.

Nevertheless, the Special Rapporteur cautioned that "the challenges ahead in Sápmi remain significant, and to meet them will require serious commitment, political will, and hard work."

"In the context of mineral extraction and large scale renewable energy projects, such as windmills, particular attention should be paid to ensuring that the traditional livelihoods of the Sami, including reindeer herding and salmon fishing, are effectively safeguarded," she said echoing the recommendations made by the former Special Rapporteur in 2010.

The expert encouraged the three governments "to ensure that their mineral laws and policies are in line with international standards related to the rights of indigenous peoples, including those requiring adequate consultations with the affected indigenous communities and their free, prior and informed consent, mitigation measures, compensation and benefit sharing."

In that context, the Special Rapporteur was pleased to learn of the commitment of the Swedish Government to revisit its mineral act.

Considering the Norwegian Sami Parliament's concerns over the current Mineral Act and the Norwegian Mineral Industry's call for the Act to be revised and clarified with respect to Sami rights, she advised the Norwegian Government to embark upon a process to do so, in close consultation with the Sami Parliament. With respect to Finland, Ms. Tauli-Corpuz was pleased to learn of the increased safeguards for Sami rights and livelihoods in the Mining Act, and hopes that Finland will continue to pay attention to the rights of the Sami in its implementation.

The Special Rapporteur emphasized in particular the cross-border efforts taken by the Sami Parliaments and the Governments of Norway, Sweden and Finland to develop a Nordic Sami Convention which could be enshrined as a global best practice to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

"As the process to negotiate the Nordic Sami Convention is now in its final stages, I will follow it with great interest and I sincerely hope that full agreement can be reached, particularly on the right to self-determination and the rights to

lands, territories and natural resources,” Ms. Tauli-Corpuz said. “I encourage all parties involved to follow through on their commitment to adopt this Convention by March 2016.”

At the Hemavan conference, she also examined both progress and remaining gaps regarding other key issues affecting Sami people, including in the areas of education, language and mental health, as well as combatting violence against Sami women.

During her visit, Ms. Tauli-Corpuz met with representatives of the Sami people, including the Sami Parliaments and the Governments of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, non-governmental organizations, including the Saami Council, and members of the local community from the Sápmi region.

The Special Rapporteur will submit in 2016 a report to the UN Human Rights Council with her conclusions and recommendations.

The Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Ms. **Victoria Tauli-Corpuz** (Philippines), is a human rights activist working on indigenous peoples’ rights. Her work for more than three decades has been focused on movement building among indigenous peoples and also among women, and she has worked as an educator-trainer on human rights, development and indigenous peoples in various contexts. She is a member of the Kankana-ey, Igorot indigenous peoples in the Cordillera Region in the Philippines. As Special Rapporteur, she is independent from any government or organization and serves in his individual capacity. Learn more, log on to:

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Read the 2010 report by the previous Special Rapporteur: [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/IPeoples/SR/A-HRC-18-35-Add2\\_en.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/IPeoples/SR/A-HRC-18-35-Add2_en.pdf)

See the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:  
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/Pages/Declaration.aspx>

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