

The 4th Session of the Forum on Minority Issues
Murmansk Region Autonomy Saami on Item IV
Female and speech is in Russian.

Good afternoon Madam Chair. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak. My name is Natalia Gavrilova, and I am the Head of the Murmansk Regional autonomy of the indigenous people – Saami. There are about 1 800 Saami in Russia. They are officially recognised as an ethnic minority in Murmansk Oblast'. And they just point 0.6% of the inhabitants. It is a territory rich in minerals and it has historically been a traditional territory of Saami, although the regional authorities have now cut the territory several times over. Women are the first carriers of culture for children and women are very active in trying to maintain culture. Industry and tourism are affecting more and more on our traditional territories, which can lead to assimilation. Children learn Saami only in primary school two hours a week. We have a problem with land use for traditional nature use such as pastoring, fishing and feeding. Two thirds of us have not received fishing quotas. The use of stylised culture as in tourism, which distorts our culture. There are problems with healthcare because of our distance from human settlements; and the problems within the labour problems and women's alcoholism. There are a few laws in Russia, which protect ethnic minorities as well as the interests of women. Article 69 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation guarantees the right to indigenous peoples in accordance with the general recognised principles of international law and international treaties signed by the Russian federation. Russian has also ratified the Framework Convention of the council of Europe on the protection of National Minorities. From The federal Budget there is financing of the needs of the indigenous population. Concept and programs are written down but they don't work on the regional level. And regional authorities do not want to resolve the most urgent problems related to indigenous peoples and to work with the indigenous peoples themselves. Financing is not used for the priorities, which we need it to be used for. Some of those resources are not used and they return to the federal budget. And our recommendations and requests are ignored. International law established the right to take part in decision-making on indigenous people's issues. One of the latest attempts to use this right was the creation of the Council of Representatives of our peoples - a group of Saami women, which worked on the subject for a long time on how to attract the attention of the regional authorities to our problems. Legislation was proposed on the part of the body, but the authorities just don't recognise that body and although we do have a written reply to the fact that the body can be set up. There is nothing being done. I would make the following recommendation, first of all to establish a structural regional legislative body, which we can have representatives of the indigenous peoples with the right to adopt independent decisions resolving issues which direct interest of the indigenous population. Given the priority over the right of use natural resources to traditional peoples living there and to recognise the whole territory of Murmansk as a location for traditional use of Saamis and to start cooperation with the representatives of the indigenous people of the Saami on an equal footing. Thank you.