



MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN
AFFAIRS OF FINLAND

The 21st session of the Human Rights Council
Item 6 – Universal Periodic Review

Statement by the Delegation of Finland
19 September 2012

Madam President, Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of Finland I would like to express our sincere appreciation to all delegations for making recommendations during our interactive dialogue in May. We thank our troika, Djibouti, Jordan and Peru, for skilfully facilitating the review process as well as the Secretariat for all their hard work and support, which we very much appreciate.

Today we warmly welcome, in particular, the opportunity to hear the views and comments from the members of civil society.

The UPR provides an important channel to elaborate on national achievements and challenges in the field of human rights in a constructive and equal manner based on true dialogue between Member States. The UPR is not only an inter-active peer assessment, it is also a peer learning process. It provides us with a variety of tools for promoting human rights based on a continued bilateral as well as multilateral dialogue.

A well-functioning civil society is an essential part of the necessary infrastructure for implementing human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Finnish administration seeks an active dialogue with citizens. The democratic system essentially includes ensuring the freedom of action of civil society as well as the broadest possible opportunities for people to participate in and influence different sectors of societal life.

Our national UPR process was also largely based on consultation and an active role of civil society. The dialogue with the Finnish non-governmental organisations offered an opportunity to assess the domestic human rights situation in a self-critical manner. This assessment facilitated an inventory of the developments and good practices as well as an ongoing discussion on the existing obstacles to the full implementation of human rights.

As the UPR recommendations illustrate, racist, discriminatory and xenophobic attitudes continue to be part of everyday life in Finland. Violence against women remains one of the most fundamental obstacles to the full realization of women's rights. The rights of persons belonging to minorities, LGBTI people, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants as well as of persons deprived of their liberty are not always fully acknowledged. Part of the population is in danger of being marginalized. These are just a few of the remaining challenges ahead of us.

Challenges to the implementation of human rights are, at the same time, future priorities. The areas of priority and commitments in Finnish human rights policy will be defined in more detail in an extensive report on Finland's international and national human rights policy to be given to Parliament in 2014. Finland's work on human rights continues to be based on the universality and indivisibility of human rights, the principle of non-discrimination and equal opportunities, and transparency. Communication and sharing experiences and best practices continue to be key principles.

As regards the implementation of the UPR recommendations, one concrete tool is the National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights. This is a cross-administrative action plan that focuses on concrete projects that will be implemented in 2012 and 2013. Many issues raised during Finland's UPR review are already covered by these projects.

As pledged during the dialogue, the newly established network of contact persons for fundamental and human rights consisting of representatives of different government ministries will review all UPR recommendations and actively follow up to their implementation. A voluntary interim-report on the progress made will be submitted to the Human Rights Council in 2014. An independent panel of human rights actors, including civil society representatives, will support the network in its work and provide advice.

Our national human rights institution, the Human Rights Centre, will naturally also be playing a significant role in monitoring the implementation of the UPR recommendations.

The Government continues to emphasise the obligatory nature and the political importance of the economic, social and cultural rights so that they also in practice enjoy equal status with civil and political rights. I am happy to inform the Council that a Government bill to ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which enables individual complaints, was submitted to Parliament in August and is currently under consideration.

Madam President,

Of the 78 recommendations made by States at our review last May, Finland immediately accepted 51 recommendations and undertook to further examine 26 recommendations. Only one recommendation was rejected. The Government has thoroughly considered these 26 pending recommendations and provided its written comments in the addendum of the Working Group's report at hand.

Of the 26 pending recommendations, Finland fully accepts 20 recommendations, partially accepts four recommendations, and is unable to support only two. This brings the total number of fully adopted recommendations to 71, partially accepted to four and rejected to three. Many of the fully accepted recommendations are already in the process of being implemented.

As regards two of the partially accepted recommendations and one rejected recommendation on human rights education and training, particularly of professional groups, we would like to clarify that the reasons for these rejections are a result of the highly autonomous nature of the Finnish higher education institutions. The Government is firmly committed in human rights-oriented thinking and promoting human rights education and training for all professional groups. However, the higher education institutions decide by themselves on the content and nature of their education. Therefore

the Government was not in a position to accept any requirement of a mandatory element imposed to all higher education institutions.

The Government's views on the recommendations were presented to the Finnish civil society on 11 September. Representatives of non-governmental organisations emphasized the need for effective follow-up to the recommendations and also inquired about their future role in this regard. The Government welcomes their participation in and contribution to the implementation process. Only by working together can we achieve positive changes for everyone.

Thank you.

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