

**Twenty-eight session
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Item 7 of the Provisional Agenda

**Implementation of resolutions and activities relating to the
Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation**

**Lack of implementation of the Place Name Act and of the Sámi Language
Act in relation to Sami place names on road signs ***

* Prepared by Lisa Monica Aslaksen (The Sámi Parliament of Norway)

**UNITED NATIONS Working Paper
GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
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Summary

The Place Name Act and the Sámi Language Act has been in force over 20 years. Although these laws have been in force over 20 years there is no systematical use of Sámi place names or Sámi language on road signs. In general Norway has a language policy that supports Sámi language rights. The problem is however that the language policy is not yet well enough implemented at the local level, because public authorities as municipalities and the Road Authorities don't follow the laws systematically.

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I. General comments

The Place Name Act and the Sámi Language Act has been in force over 20 years. Although these laws have been in force over 20 years there is no systematical use of Sámi place names or Sámi language on road signs. The Place Name Act is practiced over the whole Sámi area of Norway, and not only in the municipalities which belong to the administration area of Sámi language. There are today 10 municipalities that are protected by the Sámi Language Act.

The Place Name Act, section 2, states: "The Sámi and the Finnish place names which are used by the local people shall usually be used by the authorities on maps, signs, along with the Norwegian name form" (The Place Name Act § 9). According to the Sámi Language Act Sámi and Norwegian languages are equal languages in the administration area of Sámi language (§ 1-5). The purpose of the laws are obvious, it is the implementation of the laws that is problematic.

II. The situation of Sámi place names on road signs

In 2013, a report commissioned by the Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs (Samiske tall forteller 6 1/2013¹), examined an issue regarding how the rights of the Sámi language in Norway are in official use, namely in relation to the choice of language on road signs. This analysis group selected six municipalities in the administration area of Sámi language. They concluded that Sámi language and Sámi terminology are sporadic taken in use on road signs. The Road Authorities lack guidelines how to follow the Sámi Language Act. The result of this is that Sámi place names are not used systematically on road signs. The practice of using Sámi language on road signs varies from municipality to municipality. Many Sámi road signs do exist, but there is a common problem, the lack of procedures on how to strengthen supervision and control of the use of language on road signs. The report mentions also economical consequences regarding use of multilingual road signs. The Government should financially guarantee the renewal of road signs to ensure that they are in accordance with the Language Act and the Place Name Act.



The analysis also shows that outside the administration area of Sámi language, road signs with Sámi names are practically non-existing. The Place Name Act also applies to municipalities outside the administration area of Sámi language.

¹ Samiske tall forteller 6 1/2013: Helander, Kaisa Rautio, Johansen, Yngve



The municipalities are responsible to make a decision on the spelling on etc. village names. There are still many Sámi names that are sent to the municipalities to be decided, but they have not made decisions on the Sámi names so they can be taken in official use. In these situations the municipalities do not follow the laws.

In general Norway has a language policy that supports Sámi language rights. The problem is however that the language policy is not yet well enough implemented at the local level, because public authorities as municipalities and the Road Authorities don't follow the laws systematically.

The Sámi Parliament of Norway has suggested that there should be a unit that supervises government agencies, so the Sámi Language act is followed. This suggested unit could also supervise that other law, as the Place Name Act is followed.

III. Concluding remarks

It has been over 20 years that the Place Name Act and Language Act has been in force, still the implementation of these laws lacks in many levels. The Group of Experts should be aware of this situation.