

Distr.: Restricted
13 July 2016

English only

Human Rights Council

Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Ninth session

11-15 July 2016

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

**Study and advice on the right to health and indigenous peoples,
with a focus on children and youth**

Expert seminar

**“The Finno-Ugric peoples and sustainable
development. Health of indigenous peoples”**

May 26 – 27, 2016

Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia, Russian Federation

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Day 1

Greetings

1. Andrey Aleksandrovich Manin delivered a welcoming speech on behalf of The Ministry of the Republic of Karelia for National Politics, Relations with Public and Religious Associations and Mass Media.
2. Ombudsman for Human Rights in the Republic of Karelia Aleksandr Sergeyevich Sharapov greeted the seminar participants. He announced that, on the request by the Ombudsman for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, his administration has produced a report, which inter alia covers information on the state of public health services, including statistical data on the accessibility of health care facilities, preventive medical examination among indigenous peoples, the morbidity rate, protection of the disabled from among indigenous peoples. The ombudsman asserted that they all have a stake in the results of the expert seminar.

Theme “International law and national standards regarding the right to health of indigenous peoples”

3. Moderator Vasily Nikolayevich Nemechkin gave a review of the Russian legislation and International law regarding a guaranteed right to health of indigenous peoples. He specifically dwelled upon the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The moderator summarized this section of the speech by saying that the key principle is to make it possible for indigenous peoples to avail of the highest attainable standards in the area of physical and mental health.
4. Chair of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Alexey Vasilyevich Tsykarev presented the preliminary results of the study “Of indigenous peoples and the right to health, with a focus on children and youth”. He dwelled more specifically upon the major challenges and trends revealed by the international experts: an increase in the suicide rate among youth, alcohol abuse, population outflow from places of traditional residence to cities, the loss of language and culture and its impact on people’s mental health, violations of women’s reproductive and sexual rights, a low awareness level about diseases, limited or inhibited access to health care in remote places of residence of indigenous peoples.
5. The speaker presented to the participants a project of recommendations of the Expert Mechanism for nation states, indigenous peoples and international organizations (Appendix №1). These recommendations call on states in cooperation with indigenous peoples to modernize their legislation and elaborate national plans in the field of public health services for indigenous peoples, and also ensure their access to health care facilities and medications. Nation states are also recommended to provide for obtaining statistical information regarding the health of indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples and nation states are also advised to draw up culturally acceptable educational programs in the field of health promotion for indigenous peoples. The World Health Organization is recommended to prioritize the health matters of indigenous peoples and to appoint a designated representative that would be in charge of this subject. Summing it up, the speaker emphasized that without ensuring the right to health there is no point in talking about the observance of other rights of indigenous peoples including the right to development.
6. Answering the participants’ questions A. V. Tsykarev emphasized the importance of ensuring access to public health services for nomad tribes and peoples living in remote and inaccessible areas. He also explained that there is no universal term “indigenous people”,

but the existing range of terms and international instruments makes it possible to effectively protect the collective rights and interests of various groups of indigenous peoples. In relation to the question of the impact of business and large industrial projects on the health of indigenous peoples, the speaker referred to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

7. In the course of the discussion the participants also brought up the question of access to health care facilities of indigenous peoples in an urban setting and the negative impact of hostel-schools on their mental health. The participants agreed that the primary focus in the sphere of the health of indigenous peoples of Russia should be on native minorities and other peoples with similar characteristics. The participants came to a conclusion that in the context of the discussion it is possible to talk about the majority of the Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia.

8. Vice-Chair of The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Aisa Bokkayevna Mukabenova presented the work of this subsidiary body established at UNECOSOC regarding the right to health of indigenous peoples. The Permanent Forum pays special attention to issues related to the health of indigenous peoples, always adverts to this subject both in during the sessions and in the course of special studies. Recently, a range of questions connected with the health of youth from among indigenous peoples have been considered, especially the problem of suicides and the subject of sexual health and reproductive rights. It is characteristic of indigenous peoples in different countries to have a low life expectancy, a high level of maternal and infant mortality and social diseases, such as tuberculosis. The access to public health services is often limited or restricted due to the cultural divides, language differences, a vast geographical distance, poverty and other factors. A high level of mental diseases, depression, drug addiction and alcohol abuse, as well as an increase in the suicide rate are all connected, among other things, with the history of colonization, the loss of traditional land, as well as the difficulties of adaptation to the demands of modern life, imposed by industrialization, commercialization and urbanization.

9. In regard to the Russian reality, the speaker also highlighted the social and economic (the destruction of the tradition lifestyle pattern and living environment, the shutting down of unprofitable production based on traditional crafts, unemployment, etc.) and biomedical (the genetic functional peculiarities of an organism, low adaptive resources, the change in the daily diet and its quality) reasons for the deterioration of health among indigenous minorities of the Russian Federation. In view of this, nation states must create innovative models that would make it possible to increase access to public health services, first of all for those who lead a nomadic life or live in remote and inaccessible areas. Statistical data collection is still a priority because it would allow an adequate evaluation of the health of indigenous minorities in order to take appropriate measures in the sphere of health care.

Theme “Access to health care facilities and morbidity rate of indigenous peoples of Russia”

10. Head of Department of Health Service Provision of the Ministry of Public Health of the Republic of Karelia Andrey Grigoryevich Mikhailov described the morbidity rate by main disease classes across the board in the Republic of Karelia, placing special emphasis on the data relating to three national districts (Kalevalsky, Olonetsky and Pryazhinsky) and Prionezhsky district (where three Vepsian rural settlements are located). The speaker emphasized that there are no diseases associated with the national identity, but it is possible to elicit a certain disposition. By way of example, he mentioned hypolactosia – milk protein intolerance observed in the Finno-Ugric peoples.

11. Among the main trends A.G. Mikhailov mentioned the higher mortality rate, the growth of the morbidity level. According to the speaker, the mortality rate due to circulatory system diseases and oncological diseases in Karelia is higher than in Northwestern Federal District. Due to the ecological issues and dietary problems there is an increase in the number of oncologic patients. Cases of pneumonia have also been reported. The speaker noted a positive trend regarding tuberculosis, but also a high mortality rate from diseases associated with alcoholism. At the same time, the tendency of tuberculosis incidence in the areas of compact settlement of indigenous peoples is one of the criteria for the allocation of federal aids to regions for the purpose of supporting indigenous minorities.

12. The speaker pointed out the rise in the number of ambulance calls. The preventive medical examination of population reveals the following risk factors: an improper diet, excessive body weight, genetic background. The speaker also mentioned the possibility of the influence of traditional crafts on the health of indigenous peoples. For instance, people keen on fishing should take into consideration that fish has a tendency to accumulate harmful substances.

13. The representative of health care industry observed that suicides and alcoholism among youth are determined by social vulnerability, low income and unemployment. A. G. Mikhailov considers lung diseases in Vepsian rural settlements to be occupational illnesses, attributing their increase to the non-observance of health and safety rules. He also emphasized the necessity of cooperation between health care facilities and local government bodies.

14. The expert from Murmansk region Valentina Vyacheslavovna Sovkina explored the theme of the seminar from the point of view of the realization of the right to health by the Saami people. The speaker mentioned the high level of alcohol abuse and the lack of relevant statistical data. She also provided a few examples of positive discrimination, when the patient files of representatives of indigenous peoples in local clinics were marked with special notes. She also mentioned the “Health Train” project as an example of positive practice.

15. V. V. Sovkina believes that representatives of indigenous peoples refuse to undergo a preventive medical examination due to its complicated procedure. Also, according to the speaker, a lot of people are not informed about the medical checkup being carried out. Indigenous peoples are often uninvolved in the preparation of awareness campaigns in the sphere of health care, and the level of interdepartmental interaction still remains low.

16. The speaker expressed great concerns about the constant growth and the high levels of the so called social diseases (tuberculosis, substance dependence disorders). The major factor of the propagation of these diseases is associated with asocial way of life and the influence of alcoholism on these processes. The speaker noted the lack of official statistics on diseases among indigenous peoples and emphasized the necessity to ensure access to health care facilities for representatives of indigenous peoples.

17. Member of Presidential Council of the Russian Federation for Interethnic Relations Gulvaira Kudenovna Kutsenko emphasized the necessity to strike a balance between the development of tourism and the preservation of the traditional lifestyle. According to the speaker, tourists and rotational employees in the places of traditional residence of indigenous peoples allow for promiscuity, which influences the incidence rate of HIV/AIDS and venereal diseases in indigenous communities.

18. G. K. Kutsenko shared her observations about the fact that the topic of sexual health is a taboo subject among indigenous populations, which in its turn hinders preventive actions. Along with that, the speaker also reported that non-profit institutions organize workshops and seminars devoted to the prevention of HIV/AIDS for youth from among indigenous peoples, local authorities and government bodies. The speaker is confirmed that

the authorities should support such activities of non-profit institutions and among other things provide funding for them.

19. In the course of the discussion, the participants suggested supporting the WHO Strategy to fight the global tuberculosis epidemic (for the period 2016-2035). It was also mentioned that it is necessary to use joint effort of the state and indigenous peoples in order to eliminate traditions and practices that have a negative effect on people's health.

Theme “Spiritual health, traditional medicine, demography, ecology”

20. The leading research associate of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology RAS Natalia Ivanovna Novikova presented a report on the topic “Life among oil derricks: the emotional well-being of aboriginal population and oil-industry workers”. According to the speaker, due to the hopelessness and frustration in the fight with the industrial exploitation, the indigenous peoples of the North can suffer from insuperable stress leading to a feeling of predeterminacy of everything that is going on around them. In this respect, indigenous peoples are more prone to alcohol abuse and suicides. In order to prevent alcoholism the speaker suggests introducing tougher regulations concerning alcohol sales, following the example of Norway and Canada. The speaker is firmly convinced that it is essential to release to the public the objective findings on the health of indigenous peoples, and in particular the data on alcoholism in indigenous communities.

21. According to the speaker, indigenous peoples care for their future – not their personal future as individuals, but their future as bearers of certain knowledge. Indigenous peoples fear that this knowledge which preserves their land can be lost. The speaker strongly believes that oil destroys the connection between man and his land, as well as the connections with their cultural foundations, which gives rise to such phenomena as alcohol abuse and suicides. The state of psychological stress leads to their escape into their own culture, which in its turn results in the encystment of the self.

22. According to N. I. Novikova, traditional crafts and industries of indigenous peoples is their freedom, whereas oil and oil derricks curtail this freedom. This is the reason why indigenous population seeks escape in their culture, and the next step would be death, escape from life. Oil and money lead to ostentatious wealth and bring in a lot of alien and negative elements to indigenous communities.

23. Another problem is the lack of special knowledge about the customs and traditions of indigenous peoples among the managerial staff of oil companies, despite the fact that it is recorded in their own internal regulations that they are supposed to know and respect the traditions of the indigenous population. The speaker emphasized that for aboriginal peoples the issue of industrial exploitation is a matter of life and death.

24. A possible way out from the current situation, according to the speaker, could be the observance of the right of indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent that the state must guarantee.

Day 2

Theme “Public health services in the areas of compact settlement of indigenous peoples. Focus: the Republic of Karelia”.

25. Chief Medical Officer of the Prionezhsky District Central Hospital Izabella Vitalyevna Kraskova made a report on the accessibility of public health services in the areas of compact settlement of the Veps people. The speaker specifically dwelled upon the problems of the wear-out and depreciation of the equipment and facilities. By way of example I. V. Kraskova mentioned the building of the local medical and obstetrical station that was erected in the 1920-s.

26. Another challenge that the health care institutions of Prionezhsky district face is the prevention of tuberculosis and silicosis, as well as the prevention of infectious diseases. In this realm, a number of international projects have been implemented. There is a problem of underfunding and use of outdated diagnostic methods. For instance, it is known that X-ray fluorography does not reveal tuberculosis at an early stage, however it is exactly this diagnostic method that is currently used everywhere.

27. The speaker pointed out that stone working and carving – a type of activity that many Vepsians are engaged in – has been proposed for being included into the list of traditional business activities of indigenous peoples. At the same time, due to the non-observance of safety rules, poor workplace hygiene and a lack of preventive actions, silicosis has become an occupational disease in the places of traditional residence of the Veps people. This is a rare instance of a traditional craft having a negative impact on the health of the indigenous population.

28. According to the speaker, the business in places of residence of indigenous peoples is supposed to provide financial support to the development of health care, especially in the cases when the business has a negative effect on the health of the population in these territories.

29. Among other challenges that the local health care faces the speaker also noted the problem of personnel reduction, the so called optimization. A high percentage of children’s and familial morbidity is reported. Poor nutrition and the declining living standards negatively affect the immune resistance of the residents in the places of traditional settlement of indigenous peoples.

30. Chief Medical Officer of the Kalevalsky District Central Hospital Svetlana Vasilyevna Krupenkina outlined the situation regarding the morbidity rate and the state of health care in the places of traditional residence of the Karelians – Kalevalsky national district. According to the speaker, the current situation in the district is characterized by a population decline due to the negative migration and the high mortality rate. Every other resident of the district has one or another disability status. The hospital provides services not only to residents of Kalevalsky district, but also to people from the neighboring settlements of Loukhsky district.

31. There are also other challenges that hinder the accessibility of public health services in Kalevalsky district, among them – a shortage of personnel and a lack of funding. The poor quality of the road network leads to the quicker wear-out of ambulances. The statistics on suicides and diseases associated with alcoholism also raise concerns. The hospital has experience in developing tele-health (health care at a distance), possesses advanced equipment. Many doctors speak Karelian and know some folk medicine practices, in

particular, the medicinal properties of some herbs. Herbal medicine is considered to be one of the elements of the Karelian culture.

Elaboration of recommendations for the World Congress of the Finno-Ugric Peoples.

Development of suggestions for the study of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

32. The seminar participants suggested dividing all the recommendations of the seminar into two groups: a) more general recommendations for the World Congress of the Finno-Ugric Peoples and the study of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, б) more specific recommendations for the federal and regional government bodies of Russia.

33. The participants' suggestions covered the following aspects:

- occupational diseases and workplace hygiene
- preventive measures and use of modern technology in preventive actions
- the need for equipment and facilities improvement
- transport accessibility improvement
- ensuring accessibility of public health services
- development of paramedicine
- spread of best practices
- obtaining objective statistical data
- training programs and maintaining workforce capacity
- use of native languages in health care
- violence against women
- a balance between business and ecology
- mental health and the activities of industrial companies
- the right to free, prior and informed consent
- the problem of social orphanhood
- promotion of healthy eating habits and a healthy lifestyle
- the social responsibility of business in the places of traditional residence of indigenous peoples
- sanitation and hygiene promotion
- revision of the law on medical and social assessment
- revision of the periodicity for confirming one's disability status in remote and inaccessible areas
- the need for urgent measures to fight the high incidence rate of tuberculosis
- revision of the factors and indicators in the sphere of health care for the allocation of federal aids to regions for the purpose of supporting indigenous peoples.

Theme “The goals and indicators of Sustainable Development and the rights of indigenous peoples. Adaptation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Finno-Ugric agenda. Elaboration of recommendations for the World Congress of the Finno-Ugric Peoples”.

34. Associate Professor of the Department of Legal Disciplines of N. P. Ogarev's Mordovian State University Vasily Nikolayevich Nemechkin presented the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the member states of the UN in 2015. He also reported on how the rights of indigenous peoples have been reflected in the sustainable development agenda for the period till 2030. The speaker pointed out the differences in terminology and

suggested that along with the rights of indigenous minorities we should also take into consideration the rights of other native peoples with similar characteristics.

35. Executive Director of the Association of Finnish Culture and Identity Sakari Linden in his capacity as a moderator of the topical field “Economics and the environment” of the VII World Congress of the Finno-Ugric peoples presented his vision of the main discussion trends in this section. The speaker believes that the main viability indicators of the Finno-Ugric peoples are: the population size, the number of native speakers and the social status of their language and culture.

36. The discussion in the topical field “Economics and the environment” is going to consist of two parts: “Sustainable economic development, indigenous peoples and business” and “Sustainable tourism (ecotourism and ethnotourism)”. The speaker believes that the Finno-Ugric movement does not take full advantage of the potential of the participation in the global movement of indigenous peoples, especially when it comes to adopting best practices. He is confirmed that the key focus in the sustainable development should be on the language preservation and its greater representation in the economic life. Sakari Linden also provided a number of examples of the commercial importance of the use of native languages in tourism.

37. Aisa Bokkayevna Mukabenova emphasized the importance of improving the qualification of representatives of indigenous peoples for their more effective involvement in the process of outlining and realization of the sustainable development agenda for the period till 2030. She also mentioned a number of other UN documents aimed at the enhancement of the role of indigenous peoples in the process of exercising their right to development, such as the resulting document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (2014), launched in May of this year. The system-wide plan on indigenous peoples has been designed to ensure the coordination of all UN agencies in the sphere of the protection of indigenous peoples’ rights and interests, especially in the realization of the sustainable development goals. The report on the implementation of the Agenda will be carried out with the use of a set of global indicators, which are expected to be supplemented by indicators developed by the state on the regional and national levels. The Permanent Forum is also elaborating specific indicators, which will be used for statistical measurements of the progress in the development of indigenous peoples of the world. She also emphasized the necessity of elaboration of such indicators on the regional and federal levels in Russia, which would allow the assessment of the progress in the implementation of such documents as the Concept of Sustainable Development of Indigenous Minorities of the Russian Federation.

The main conclusions:

1. Due to the social and economic ill-being, stress, poor nutrition, lack of awareness and insufficient prevention, indigenous peoples have a weak immunity and are subject to various infectious, non-infectious and social diseases.
2. The access of indigenous peoples to high-quality public health services is hindered by the current state of the equipment and facilities, shortage of personnel, limited use of information and communication technology, insufficient funding, closing down of the “unprofitable” health care institutions.
3. There is no clear strategy regarding the elimination of the negative impact of industrial companies on the health of indigenous peoples.
4. The potential of the cooperation between organizations of indigenous peoples, public authorities and health care institutions, that together could carry on awareness-raising and preventive campaigns, is nowhere near exhausted.

Recommendations

To the bodies of executive power of the Russian Federation:

1. To ensure exchange of good practices in the area of health care and to provide support to initiatives aimed at the improvement of the periodic medical examination system and health promotion of indigenous peoples, such as the “Health Train” in Murmansk region.
2. To ensure collection and publication of objective statistical data on the morbidity rate among indigenous peoples. To introduce statistical recording of medical, demographical and social indicators of indigenous minorities through the use of different forms of federal state statistical monitoring.
3. In cooperation with organizations of indigenous peoples, to elaborate educational and training programs for the staff of industrial companies on the traditions and culture of indigenous peoples for the purpose of raising awareness of the companies’ managerial staff about the importance of the traditional lifestyle for the preservation of the culture of indigenous peoples and their emotional health.
4. To elaborate programs for the development of paramedicine and for the training of paramedics, involving specialists from among the indigenous population. To make provision for the funding for the development of paramedicine.
5. To revise the system of periodic confirmation of one’s disability status for representatives of indigenous peoples residing in remote and inaccessible areas.
6. To revise the indicators for allocating grants-in-aid to regions for the purpose of supporting indigenous peoples connected with the incidence rate of tuberculosis.

To the legislative bodies of the Russian Federation:

1. To formalize in legislation the responsibility of industrial companies to perform timely repairs of the infrastructure and to ensure workplace hygiene and safety, and also to implement policies that would secure the right to health, in particular the mental health of indigenous peoples, in compliance with the UN Guiding principles on Business and Human Rights.

2. **To prohibit alcohol advertizing and considerably restrict the retail sales of alcoholic products in the places of traditional residence of indigenous peoples.**

To legal institutes and human rights bodies:

The human-rights ombudsman in the Russian Federation and the regional representatives are to prepare topical reports on the enforcement of the right to health of indigenous peoples.

To organizations of indigenous peoples:

In cooperation with the public authorities and health care institutions, to elaborate awareness-raising campaigns, seminars and workshops for indigenous peoples on a healthy lifestyle, healthy nutrition, sexual health, prevention of venereal diseases and HIV/AIDS.
