



11th of April 2014

To the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee

Re: Questionnaire concerning Local government and human rights

The Finnish Human Rights Centre thanks the Advisory Committee for the opportunity to provide information regarding the role of local government in the promotion and protection of human rights in Finland.

The Centre regrets the fact that due to time constraints its reply is **restricted only to observations relating to the status of human rights education at the local level**, providing thus answers to items 7–9 of the questionnaire, in the first hand.

The Human Rights Centre is an autonomous and independent expert institution whose task is to promote the implementation of fundamental and human rights and increase cooperation and exchange of information between various actors. Its work consists of acquiring, compiling and distributing information, building cooperation, taking initiatives and participating in international cooperation.

The Human Rights Centre has a 40-member Human Rights Delegation. The Human Rights Centre is administratively connected to the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The Centre, its Delegation and the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman together form the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) in Finland.

The Human Rights Centre wishes to draw the attention of the Advisory Committee to the **lack of human rights education at the local government level in Finland**.

The Centre conducted a national base line survey on the status of human rights education in Finland, covering also the local government. The study was published in February. An English summary is available at the Centre's website: www.humanrightscentre.fi.

The information on local administration was mainly collected from the authorities' web pages. Individual municipalities could not be examined within the scope of the review other than by way of example. Furthermore, no coordinated information is available, in particular, as far as the municipal sector is concerned.

In conclusion, the study revealed that **human rights education and training is implemented in Finland in various ways and in several sectors**. Nevertheless, the field is marked by **heterogeneity and lack of a systematic approach**. Even though more and more attention has lately been paid to the environment and culture of education and training, teaching on human rights norms and mechanisms is still relatively limited.

The greatest challenge is the lack of human rights training in the education of teachers and educators, on the one hand, and **in the education of civil and public servants on the other. The situation is particularly worrying in the municipal sector**.



The Centre wishes to emphasize that **state and municipal public servants have a key role in the realisation of fundamental and human rights**. The obligation to safeguard these rights is also laid down in **Section 22 of the Constitution, according to which the public authorities shall guarantee the realisation of fundamental and human rights**. The Constitution further guarantees the right to good governance (Section 21(2)). The legal principles of good governance (such as equality) are defined in Chapter 2 of the Administrative Act, whose general justifications (Government Proposal 72/2002) refer to the international obligations binding on Finland, in particular to the additional quality requirements set for national administration by the EU law and the European Convention on Human Rights.

The legislation does not, however, set special requirements for the skills or competences of public servants in this field, not even for the senior public servants. According to Section 125 of the Constitution, the general qualifications for public office are skill, ability and proven civic merit. The Act on Government Officials (750/1994), the Act on Municipal Public Servants (304/2003), the acts on collective agreements for public servants and the selection criteria for senior posts in the government (Ministry of Finance - VM/728/00.00.00/2011) do not provide for fundamental and human rights knowledge and skills or commitments to respecting them.

The municipalities are responsible for organising continuing education for municipal public servants. However, no coordinated information is available on the continuing education and its content provided by the municipal sector. Based on the scattered information obtained from various sources, it seems obvious that human rights training **is not organised for municipal public servants and persons of trust, apart from a few exceptions**. Occasional human rights-related training is organised by regional state administrative authorities, for example.

Based on the findings of the study **the Human Rights Delegation of the Human Rights Centre issued a set of general recommendations**. Concerning the local authorities the recommendations is that the

The human rights knowledge and skills of public servants and other persons exercising public power and functions should be ensured.

It should be ensured that all state and municipal public servants and other persons exercising public power and functions have sufficient human rights knowledge and skills by offering them appropriate training. All public servants should master the basics of human rights and have specific knowledge about the human rights issues related to their field of administration. Legislators should also be offered human rights training.

Human rights training should be integrated into the introductory and continuing training offered to public servants and other persons exercising public power and functions. On the municipal level, the human rights knowledge and skills of the persons of trust should also be strengthened.

- Human rights should be included in the teaching at each state educational institution.
- A study module on human rights should be included in the introductory training



programme for public servants and integrated into continuing training provided in different administrative sectors.

- Human rights training should be incorporated into the introductory and continuation training offered to municipal public servants, persons of trust and other persons exercising public power and functions.
- The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities should consider its potential role in supporting the human rights training of municipal public servants, persons of trust and other persons entrusted with public authority.

On behalf of the Human Rights Centre

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