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National Advocacy for Children's Rights
Greenland

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The rights of the indigenous child under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Expert Mechanism on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples

Submission by:

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Introduction

The Greenlandic Spokesperson for Children and the National Advocacy for Children's Rights (MIO) has a special mandate to monitor children's conditions and assess whether legislation and practice are in line with Greenland's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Act on Children's Spokesman and Children's Council was passed in 2011. The institution assesses the conditions under which children live, spreads awareness of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and provides advice and guidance on children's rights. The task is also to propose measures that strengthen children's rights, raise current issues to debate, represent the children's voice in the public debate and work on giving children better opportunities to participate in the debate and influence the development of society.

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The institution is politically independent.

In the years 2015-2019 Greenland's Children's Spokesperson Aviâja Egede Lyngé carried out the advocacy activities by listening to children's own words about their lives in their own surroundings. The result of the visits and interviews in 40 cities and settlements is a series of travel reports with a collection of statements from the rights holders themselves - children and young people in Greenland – about life seen from their perspective.

From the dialogues and surveys with children, community members, professionals from health, school and social sectors, a great gap between the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the national law and the actual reality in which children and youth are living has been uncovered. The National Child Rights Institution MIO estimates that Greenland does not comply with up to 20 articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This submission contains a description of the main issues and describes how MIO uses involvement as a key working method.

Background and context

According to Greenland Statistics the national population is almost 56,000, of which 14,000 are children and adolescents. About 92 percent of the population of Greenland lives on the West Coast and primarily in the major cities. Besides the cities there are approximately 60 settlements with between 50 and 500 inhabitants each.

The Greenlandic people are part of the indigenous people Inuit and with the new Self-Government Agreement, which entered into force in 2009, Greenlanders are recognized as a people under international law. Greenland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993 and also recognized its responsibility to implement the ILO C169 and the UN Declaration on Indigenous peoples.

Inuit covers many different cultures; this is also true within Greenland, as the size of the country provides for big differences in the way of life of people in the north, east and south/west. MIO stresses that children and adolescents live in close contact with nature with their own local traditions although without equal opportunities for education, and social and health care services.

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Main political and structural measures related to children's living conditions since 2017

- 2017: Greenland's Parliament Inatsisartut passes a new law on child support
- 2018: Killiliisa – Naalakkersuisut's (Government of Greenland) strategy to reduce sexual abuse against children 2018-2022
- 2018: National action plan against parental neglect of children 2020-2030
- 2020: Inatsisartut adopts a National Action Plan for implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The need for access to psychological recovery - Article 39 - Convention on the Rights of the Child

MIO's travel reports and inquiries from children and adults show that a disturbingly large group of children and youth do not receive the care, protection, and recovery they need and are entitled to. The biggest problems that are reported to MIO are:

- Children who have been sexually abused receive no or insufficient help
- Sexual assaults are taking place in all social groups
- Underreporting of sexual assaults to the authorities is widespread
- Children are exposed to violence
- Children grow up in homes with severe substance abuse problems
- The child's right to education and development is seriously challenged
- Bullying and mental abuse are widespread
- Municipalities do not have sufficient resources to carry out all the tasks that come with the national legislation
- There is no overall overview of how many people – children as well as adults – who suffer from anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.¹

¹ See MIO's travel reports: www.mio.gl

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The children's own reporting is reflected in a recent population survey in Greenland (2018)²:

- 28 percent of young people born in 1995 or later have grown up with domestic violence.
- 37 percent of the same target group have grown up with alcohol problems at home.
- 20 percent of persons born in 1995 or later have been sexually abused. An even greater proportion of parents and the grandparent generation have also been exposed to sexual abuse in their childhood and may experience long-term psychological sequelae.
- 43 suicides in 2018, corresponding to almost 8 suicides per 10,000 inhabitants, means that many young people have experienced the loss of a close friend to suicide and have knowledge of suicide in the family. The proportion of young people who have attempted suicide is high and there are significantly more girls than boys. 13 percent of the girls and women in the age group 15-24 years have answered that they have tried to commit suicide in the past year, while 22 percent have had suicidal thoughts. Among the boys and men in the age group 15-24 years approximately 5.3 percent answered that they had attempted suicide within the past year. Furthermore, the population survey shows that suicidal thoughts are more common among people who have grown up with alcohol, violence and sexual abuse.

Children's right to education is seriously challenged - Article 28 - Convention on the Rights of the Child

About half of the population of all 25-64 years old has no education above the lower-secondary level and only 1 in 7 pupils proceed directly to upper-secondary education.³ Despite a strong and modern law on primary and lower-secondary education, which is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and despite a great political focus on education, there is nevertheless an excessively large group of young people today who get no education.

The existing knowledge about children and young people in the education system can, in several areas, be characterized as deficient. A special need can be pointed out for knowledge about why young people do not complete primary school and/or do not progress after primary school. Given the quantitative and qualitative data described above on the mental well-being of children

² Befolkningsundersøgelsen i Grønland 2018. Levevilkår, livsstil og helbred. Oversigt over indikatorer for folkesundheden. SIF's Grønlandsskrifter nr. 20. Statens Institut for Folkesundhed, SDU, 2019.
https://www.sdu.dk/da/sif/rapporter/2019/befolkningsundersoegelsen_i_groenland

³ Statistics Greenland, 2020, www.stat.gl

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and adolescents, MIO assesses that it is likely that children's and adolescents' opportunities for learning are limited because their concentration instead revolves around concerns. MIO's assessment is supported by an evaluation of Greenland's primary and lower-secondary school from 2015 that shows that 18 percent of teachers estimate that at least 25 percent of primary school pupils have difficulties of importance to their learning or well-being.⁴ Studies indicate that children who are victims of neglect often have language problems and learning difficulties, for example. These children are no less gifted. Rather, they have had to develop other parts of their giftedness than those typically measured in the school system.⁵

Also, the high level of bullying reported by children in MIO's travel reports is reflected in HBSC studies that show bullying is a relatively widespread phenomenon among children and adolescents.⁶ Studies indicate that there is a connection between bullying and academic performance in school, physical and mental symptoms, and self-destructive actions (Ibid.).

Children's right to health and life is jeopardized - Articles 24, 27 & 39 - Convention on the Rights of the Child

Social determinants of health include factors that go beyond what is traditionally perceived as health, but which nonetheless have a major impact on health and well-being. Social determinants of health are the conditions we are born into, grow up in and live under, such as housing conditions, economic resources, education, employment, working conditions and health care.⁷

Equal access to healthcare services is very challenging in Greenland partly because of the geography and infrastructure.⁸ Often there is neither a doctor nor a dentist in the smaller settlements. Citizens express concern that illnesses are discovered too late and that they have to travel far to the nearest town to receive medical treatment.

As a grave example of the implications for children, MIO has spoken to health professionals in smaller settlements who have encountered children with symptoms of sexual abuse. When a child

⁴ Grønlands folkeskole. Evaluering 2015. Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut 2015, <https://www.eva.dk/grundskole/groenlands-folkeskole>

⁵ Overgreb mod børn. Ser du det? Gør du noget? Det Kriminalpræventive Råd, 2002

⁶ HBSC Greenland. Data fra Skolebørnsundersøgelsen 2018. Statens Institut for Folkesundhed, SDU, 2019. https://www.sdu.dk/da/sif/rapporter/2019/hbhc_greenland

⁷ Ingen børn skal vokse op i fattigdom. Fattigdom og social ulighed i børnehøjde i Grønland. Statens Institut for Folkesundhed, SDU, 2010. https://www.sdu.dk/da/sif/rapporter/2013/ingen_boern_skal_vokse_op_i_fattigdom

⁸ In Greenland many cities and smaller settlements are isolated and there are no roads between them. All transport is costly and takes place either by plane, ship, helicopter, snowmobiles or/and dog sledge depending on seasons.

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has been sexually abused in a settlement without a doctor it is necessary to bring the child to a larger city in order to perform a medical examination. But due to the geographical distance and the travel time, physical evidence of abuse is diminished or lost and the further process stalls leaving the child with no restoration or psychological recovery.

MIO's work method

We work from the point where each town and settlement we visit has its own collective cultural codes, values and norms. We adapt our methods to each location; otherwise we do not meet them in an equal and respectful way, and we do not get into their various degrees and types of taboo. We are aware that in small communities as well as in cities people are often interdependent, socially and economically. If the offender is the provider of the family or a public figure with influence it becomes even harder to react to assaults. It is also important to keep in mind that hierarchies of power differ from place to place. And for many who were brought up on the basis of a collectivism (where fighting for ones own boundaries could potentially threaten the survival of the extended family), individual boundaries have traditionally been "forbidden" for the individual family members.

MIO's work method has proven to create a marked and necessary awareness of the conditions of children and young people in Greenland. Serious taboos about the conditions of children, young people and families have come to light and brought up and articulated in a way that creates action in both the population and politicians.