

Parallel Information:
**Children belonging to the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the
North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation**

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Introduction

This submission has been prepared by RAIPON, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, an indigenous peoples' organisation in consultative status with ECOSOC, representing 41 indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation, in collaboration with IWGIA, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, an NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC that supports indigenous peoples' organisations globally, and with assistance from the Institute for Ecology and Action Anthropology (INFOE), Cologne, Germany.

In this submission, we look at the situation of children belonging to Russia's indigenous small-numbered peoples which, while only numbering approximately 280,000 people, traditionally inhabit around two-thirds of the land mass of the Russian Federation. Even though these indigenous peoples are highly diverse in terms of their descent, history, language, ethnicity and culture, they have some important aspects in common, such as the prevalence of a traditional subsistence-oriented way of life based on fishing, hunting/gathering or reindeer husbandry. A profound knowledge of and relationship with the territories they have traditionally used or occupied is deeply engrained in their cultures, which are finely adapted to their fragile environments, often marked by extreme climatic conditions. Indigenous children are an especially vulnerable subgroup of the indigenous peoples of the North, and are, on the one hand, particularly affected by the tremendous political, economic and environmental changes affecting their peoples, from massive environmental destruction caused by extractive industries to the lack of guaranteed land and resource rights. On the other, indigenous children face additional human rights challenges, in particular in the areas of education, health, nutrition and the right to a family life. It is on these latter points that this submission focuses.¹

Lack of disaggregated data

In its General Comment 11 on indigenous children and their rights under the convention, the Committee highlights “the need for data collection to be disaggregated to enable discrimination or potential discrimination to be identified.”² The State party's report clearly fails to comply with this recommendation. Figures presented in part D of the State party's report are not specific to the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East. Instead, figures provided in this section refer to the entire population of the “districts of the Far North and localities equivalent to the Far North”³. The latter term is an administrative category encompassing large parts of the Russian North, Siberia and the Far East. Within most of these districts, indigenous peoples nowadays constitute small minorities. For example, in Khanty-Mansi autonomous okrug, they account for less than 2 per cent of the region's population; in most other regions in the list, their share of the regional population is less than 10 per cent. The figures for their total population provided in the State party's report therefore allow no meaningful conclusions to be drawn regarding the situation of indigenous children. Nor do the results of the 2010 national census provide data on the situation of children disaggregated by ethnicity.

1 More general information on the situation of indigenous peoples in the Russian North can be obtained from the parallel report submitted to CERD's 82nd session, available from http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/ngos/RAIPON_IWGIA_INFOE_RussianFederation82.pdf

2 CRC/C/GC/11, Para 24

3 Russian term: “*Raiony Krainego Severa I mestnosti, priravnennye k Krainemu Severu*”. The official list of territories included is available at <http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=LAW;n=127020>. For an explanation of the significance of this term, see Brian Donahoe, Joachim Otto Habeck et al.: *Size and Place in the Construction of Indigeneity in the Russian Federation*, in: *Current Anthropology*, Vol 49, No 6, 993-1020

The State party should undertake measures to collect and compile disaggregated data on the situation of children belonging to the indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East, regarding areas such as health and access to healthcare, access to education, including native language education, and child mortality.

Primary education

As the Committee on the Rights of the Child notes in its General Comment regarding indigenous children, states should take special measures to ensure that “indigenous children enjoy their right to education on an equal footing with non-indigenous children” and “that school facilities are easily accessible where indigenous children live” (CRC/C/GC/11, para 61). During the reporting period, the State party has been enforcing the rules set out in the Federal Act “On Education” (“*Ob Obrazovanii*”), which stipulate the closure of schools in settlements with less than a minimum number of students. In so doing, it is failing to take into consideration the fact that standards based on the demographic and geographic conditions of Central Russia are out of place in the Far North, where conditions are very different and the population density is much lower.⁴

According to Russia's 4th to 5th periodic report to CRC, 567 small schools in the “territories of the Far North and locations equivalent to the Far North” were closed between 2003 and 2009 (CRC/C/RUS/4-5, para 296), a trend which, according to the information available, is still continuing. Indigenous children affected by such measures are deprived of access to primary education, unless they are sent to boarding school at the age of seven. This means spending nine months of the year away from their families.

The State party should take special measures to ensure that indigenous children can fully enjoy their right to education. Closures of village schools in indigenous settlements should be halted and reversed, and special measures taken to ensure that indigenous children in remote areas, including nomadic and semi-nomadic communities, can enjoy - at a minimum - primary education without being separated from their families and communities. The State party should also support community-supported small ungraded schools, which should be exempted from the requirements regarding the minimum necessary number of students established by the Federal Law “On Education”.

As was the practice in countries such as Austria and the USA, the Soviet Union introduced a system of boarding schools, where children of nomadic families were kept for most of the year. These schools have survived the collapse of the Soviet Union and, in addition to nomadic children, an increasing number of indigenous children from small settlements are now attending these schools due to the on-going policy of school closures. This means that, from the age of seven, children have to spend nine months of the year away from their parents and communities. Commenting on the effects of this educational system on the indigenous children in Taimyr district, A. Bolin writes: “The presence of the children of the Tundra dwellers in the boarding school in Dudinka⁵ adversely affects their mental health. The children want to go home; over the last year, more children have run away from the boarding school (according to information from the commission on the affairs of minors).”⁶

While many of these schools have changed their curricula over the last 20 years to include subjects

4 See also the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, James Anaya, on the situation of indigenous peoples in the Russian Federation (A/HRC/15/37/Add.5) Par. 70

5 Dudinka is the administrative centre of the Taimyr district

6 A Bolin: “*Analiz rezultatov likvidatsii avtonomii na Taimyre I v Evenkii*”. In: *Mir Korenykh Narodov. Zhivaya Arktina*. Vol 25, 2010, pp. 88-95

pertaining to indigenous culture and way of life, they are unable to compensate for the loss of the family environment, which is the primary space where transmission of traditional indigenous knowledge, including language, cultural knowledge and practical skills, takes place. Additionally, the quality of formal education received in boarding schools is inferior to the national average, thus limiting their opportunities in mainstream society. ⁷ Whenever positive changes have been noted in the development of boarding schools, a crucial aspect of this has been recognition of the parents' role in their children's education and their participation in decision-making and planning. Under the mainstream concept of school education in Russia, however, the parents' role in education is completely secondary.⁸

The State party should take measures to ensure that the separation of indigenous children from their parents, caused by the boarding school system, is avoided and, whenever it is unavoidable, that the traumatic effects of this experience are minimized. Parents should be encouraged to be actively involved in the affairs of the boarding schools attended by their children. It should be ensured that the quality of formal education offered by boarding schools is at least equal to the national average.

The following report from Yakutia exemplifies the need for special measures by the State party regarding access to education for children from nomadic families: "The families of Yakut reindeer herders, hunters and fishermen, lead a nomadic way of life following the sources of their existence, the reindeer along the tundra and taiga. The majority of these families do not have a stationary home in the settlement where they are registered. When school begins, children are torn away from their families and transferred into boarding schools from the age of seven. This leads to an intergenerational rift and the alienation of youth from the traditional economic activities along with a failure to acquire those skills, which can only be obtained through permanently living in a reindeer brigade from early infancy."⁹ Yakutia was the first of Russia's regions to adopt a law on nomadic schools. This initiative is an important step and it should be followed by other regions and by the Federal Government,

Since the 1990s, initiatives in various regions have developed alternative school models, and the State party should actively support and encourage these. They include small-scale nomadic or tundra schools which minimize the separation between children and parents and are embedded in the indigenous communities. It is crucial that these schools allow for parents to be actively engaged in the education process, not least because the parents' presence and role in transmitting their values, traditional knowledge, customs and skills to their children cannot be substituted by schools. As research has demonstrated, a merely school-based native language education cannot substitute for the comprehensive learning processes children undergo within their family contexts. The participation of indigenous groups, and especially parents, in decision-making and management of education, which are an integral aspect of the management of these schools, has been found to be a particular challenge to state bureaucracies.

The State party should take special measures to support initiatives developing and maintaining new types of schools, which are better embedded into indigenous communities, avoid separation of children from their parents and allow for strong parental participation in decision-making. Federal legislation should be amended to

⁷ Stephan Dudeck: *Challenging the State Educational System in Western Siberia: Taiga School by the Tiutiakha River*, in: Erich Kasten (ed): *Sustaining Indigenous Knowledge: Learning Tools and Community Initiatives for Preserving Endangered Languages and Local Cultural Heritage*, 2013, pp 129–157.

⁸ Cf Roza Laptander: *Model for the Tundra School in Yamal: a new education system for children from nomadic and semi-nomadic Nenets families*, In: Kasten (ed) 2013, pp 181-194

⁹ Media service of the Il Tumen, the parliament of Yakutia, 11 October 2010, <http://il-tumen.sakha.ru/?id=15799&y=2010&m=10>, verified 2 March 2011

remove obstacles to the establishment of such schools in all regions inhabited by indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North.

Language

In the case of the indigenous peoples of the North, native language education, which is dealt with in Para 297 of the State party's report, mostly falls short of complying with Art. 62 of General Comment 11. Even in primary education, native languages are virtually never used as the language of instruction. Native language is reduced to the status of a minor subject. This compounds the fact that the State party's education policy, since the 1950s in particular, has driven a widespread loss of language. Today, with the exception of nomadic communities and remote settlements, very few indigenous children ever acquire native proficiency in the language of their ethnic group. The present situation is a consequence of what has been described as a practice of "subtractive education"¹⁰, replacing the indigenous with the dominant language and culture.

Even in a well-funded region like Khanty-Mansi autonomous okrug, reportedly less than half of Khanty pupils are taught their language in school and less than 5% have the opportunity to practise their language in pre-school facilities. Between 2008 and 2011, the number of pupils taking part in the school subject 'native language' dropped from 2,610 to 1,595. Over the last 20 years, the Khanty-speaking community has lost a quarter of its speakers.¹¹

The State party should take measures to reverse the deterioration of native language education at primary schools and ensure that native languages are practised in pre-school facilities. Furthermore, it should take measures to encourage increased use of native languages in family contexts and daily life.

Health situation of indigenous children

Indigenous children living in remote locations in the Russian North, Siberia and the Far East have been particularly affected by the dismantling of public health infrastructure over the last two decades. The poor state of healthcare in remote villages is exemplified by the death of a girl from Chumikan village, who died of tuberculosis in a hospital in Khabarovsk in April 2012. Her parents had taken her to the polyclinic in her native village as early as November 2011, where she was diagnosed with TB. However, no adequate treatment was available locally and she was not transferred to the regional capital of Khabarovsk until February, by which time doctors were unable to save her life.¹² As reported by the Khabarovsk association of indigenous peoples, mortality in the Tuguro-Chumikanski district exceeds the birth rate several times over. Doctors are working only in the district centre of Chumikan and will not risk the journey to other settlements.¹³

Paren is a Koryak village of 60 inhabitants in Penzhinski district in Northern Kamchatka territory. In October 2009, the "Lach" indigenous information centre reported that the inhabitants of Paren were left with no food other than fish and wild plants, and without access to medicine and clothing. The children had not been attended by any doctor or nurse for two years. No treatment was available for sick children. When the report was published, the children had been suffering from an unknown virus for a number of months. Young mothers had nothing to eat or to feed their babies. In

10 Ole Henrik Magga et al: *Indigenous Children's Education and Indigenous Languages*. Expert paper written for the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2005

11 Stephan Dudeck: *Challenging the State Educational System in Western Siberia: Taiga School by the Tuutiakha River*, in: *Sustaining Indigenous Knowledge: Learning Tools and Community Initiatives for Preserving Endangered Languages and Local Cultural Heritage*, edited by Erich Kasten and Tjeerd de Graaf 2013, 129–157.

12 <http://amurmedia.ru/news/khabkrai/22.05.2012/207067/habarovskaya-shkolnitsa-skonchalas-ot-otkrytoi-formi-tuberkuleza.html>

13 <http://www.raipon.info/component/content/article/1-novosti/3089-2012-05-25-14-09-05.html>

the winter months, the inhabitants had come close to starvation. After a complaint was submitted to the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, a one-off shipment of food and other products was delivered to the village; however, by spring 2010, no further supplies had reached the village.

The State party should take every measure necessary to ensure that indigenous children in remote locations have full and free access to healthcare, including regular health check-ups and transport facilities for children needing to be transferred to a regional or district centre.

Right to adequate food

Indigenous children increasingly lack sufficient access to the traditional Northern diet, which plays a central role in maintaining their physical and mental capacities. Northern indigenous peoples are accustomed to a dietary mix based on fish and animal protein. This contains very few carbohydrates, while vitamins are provided mainly through raw meat, berries and raw fish. This type of nutrition appears adapted to the “Northern type” metabolism of indigenous peoples of the North, which has to withstand tremendous environmental stress due to the extreme climatic conditions of the North.¹⁴

Lack of access to the traditional diet, and its replacement by Western-style food rich in carbohydrate and sugar, has been linked to increased prevalence of diseases such as arteriosclerosis, diabetes, hypertension and heart attacks, which have traditionally been very low among indigenous peoples. This also profoundly affects the mental and physical well-being of the children.¹⁵ Access to the traditional diet is best guaranteed in families or communities that maintain a traditional way of life, if they have sufficient access and use rights to land and resources.

Most boarding schools, however, serve carbohydrate and sugar-rich Western-style food. Furthermore, Western-style food may increasingly dominate the diet of many indigenous communities and families if they have insufficient access to land and resources. To date, Russia has no working system of providing indigenous land titles. A law on indigenous territories was passed in 2001 but has never been put into practice. At the same time, the State party has been pursuing a policy of privatisation of natural resources by which the majority of traditional indigenous fishing grounds have been licensed to private businesses, leaving many communities without sufficient access to land, hunting and fishing resources.

The State party should undertake measures to ensure that indigenous children in boarding schools, day care institutions or other public educational facilities have access to their traditional diet. Furthermore, the State party should ensure that indigenous families have guaranteed access to the land and resources, including hunting and fishing grounds, necessary to provide their children with a traditional Northern diet.

14 The distinctiveness of the indigenous peoples’ metabolism has been the subject of multiple research papers, including William R. Leonard et al.: *Metabolic Adaptation in Indigenous Siberian Populations*, in: *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 34: 451-471

15 Cf. V.I. Hasnulin: *Severnyi tip metabolizma i potrebnost ryby v ratsionakh pitaniya na Severe*. http://old.iea.ras.ru/conferences/2009/medanrtho_summer_school/texts/hasnulin_metabolism.pdf