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To the Barents Working Group of Indigenous Peoples in BEAR

Geographical and legal preconditions for the inclusion of Karelians in the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples of the Barents Region

The Republic of Karelia is one of the 14 regions that make up the Barents Euro-Arctic region. In the Republic of Karelia, a legal framework has been introduced that regulates various aspects of the implementation of state national policy on its territory, including measures of state support for indigenous peoples. The system of goals, principles, main directions, tasks and mechanisms for the implementation of the state national policy in the Republic of Karelia is the National Policy Strategy for the Republic of Karelia for the period until 2025, approved by the decree of the Government of the Republic of Karelia dated November 13, 2015 No. 699p-II. In accordance with the Strategy, according to the duration of historical residence and livelihoods, Karelians are included to the list of indigenous peoples of Karelia equally with Veps. The Strategy also confirms, as one of the goals of the implementation of the state national policy of the Russian Federation in the territory of the Republic of Karelia until 2025, is "preservation and development of the Karelians and Vepsians as distinct ethnoses of the world community". The strategy states that both indigenous peoples of the Republic of Karelia - the Karelians and Vepsians - "in the last few decades found themselves in a difficult demographic situation, characterized by an unprecedented decline in their numbers, caused by the growing processes of assimilation".¹

As a tool for the implementation of the Strategy of the State National Policy, the Government of the Republic of Karelia of 24.01.2018 put into effect the state program of the Republic of Karelia "Ethno-social and ethno-cultural development of territories of traditional residence of indigenous peoples". The program considers the Karelians and Vepsians to be the indigenous peoples of Karelia. It is emphasized at the same time that additional rights to these peoples are guaranteed due to the socio-economic and demographic circumstances that are unfavorable for them. The purpose of the Program is formulated as "ensuring ethno-social and ethno-cultural development of territories of traditional residence of indigenous peoples in the Republic of Karelia".²

Another instrument for implementing state national policy in the Republic of Karelia is the Law of the Republic of Karelia "On State Support for Karelian, Vepsian and

¹ Стратегия национальной политики в Республике Карелия на период до 2025 года.

<http://nationalkom.karelia.ru/assets/Uploads/Novaya-papka/699r-P.docx>

² Государственная программа Республики Карелия «Этносоциальное и этнокультурное развитие территорий традиционного проживания коренных народов»

<http://gov.karelia.ru/Legislation/lawbase.html?lid=20112>

Finnish Languages in the Republic of Karelia"³ adopted by the Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Karelia in 2004. The law provides equal guarantees to Karelian and Vepsian languages, as to indigenous languages, as well as closely related Finnish language, as the language of the Finnish minority of Karelia.

The Constitution of the Republic of Karelia in Article 21 fixes measures for the revival, preservation and free development of the Karelians, Vepsians and Finns residing on its territory. In addition to this, Article 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Karelia emphasizes that "the historical and national characteristics of the Republic of Karelia are determined by the residence of Karelians on its territory"⁴.

At the same time, at the federal level, unlike the Veps, Karelians are not included in the Unified List of Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation and the list of indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation. This fact is explained only by the fact that the federal legislator establishes the criterion of the number of people (50,000) as one of the criteria necessary to give it the status of an indigenous small-numbered. According to the All-Russia Population Census of 2010, there are 60,815 Karelians in the Russian Federation, of which 45,670 live in the Republic of Karelia.⁵ Also important is the demographic decline of 35 percent, recorded between the 2002 and 2010 censuses. In the collective monograph "Ethnic and Religious Diversity of Russia"⁶ published in early 2018, the specialists of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences predicted that by 2025 the number of Nenets in Russia will exceed 50,000 people, which will make this nation out of the small-numbered category. According to scientists, instead of them in this list may be included Karelians, which by this time will be less than 50,000 people. These forecasts make us wonder whether it is worthwhile for international cooperation organizations to focus solely on specific norms of national legislation, or to give priority to international standards in the field of indigenous peoples' rights, the quintessence of which is the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted in 2007. In this regard, it is important to note that Vepsians received representation in the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples of the Barents Region in 1997, and only in 2006 they received the status of indigenous small people of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation. That is, in the case of the Veps, the decision was guided by international standards, which provided moral support in discussing the status of the Veps when drawing up the Single List of Indigenous Minorities of the Russian Federation.⁷

In connection with the application of specific norms of Russian legislation, the conclusion of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, recorded in the report on his official visit to Russia in 2010, should be cited.

³ Закон Республики Карелия «О государственной поддержке карельского, вепсского и финского языков в Республике Карелия» <http://gov.karelia.ru/Legislation/lawbase.html?lid=1751>

⁴ Конституция Республики Карелия <http://www.gov.karelia.ru/gov/Constitution/index.html>

⁵ Всероссийская перепись населения

http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-01.pdf

⁶ Этническое и религиозное многообразие России / под ред. В.А. Тишкова, В.В.

Степанова. – М.: ИЭА РАН, 2017. – 551 с. <http://iea-ras.ru/index.php?go=Files&in=view&id=370>

⁷ Строгальщикова З.И. Карельская региональная общественная организация «Общество вепсской культуры». Финно-угорский мир, 2011, №1, с. 78-81 <http://csfu.mrsu.ru/arh/2011/1/78-81.pdf>

In this document, the then-UN Special Rapporteur Professor James Anaya noted that in the Russian Federation there is a term "indigenous small people". The Special Rapporteur however stresses: "There may be groups that share the characteristics and challenges of small-numbered indigenous peoples but which, because of the numerical population limitation, do not enjoy the corresponding recognition or legal protections". The UN Special Rapporteur recommends the federal government in this regard: «The rights of ethnically distinct indigenous groups that do not meet the legislative criteria for designation as "small-numbered indigenous peoples", but that nonetheless have characteristics similar to those within this category, should be protected. Consideration should be given to adapting this category, or to otherwise extending special protections for the benefit of such groups, in accordance with relevant international standards».⁸

International standards do not contain a universal definition of the term indigenous people. However, the two most authoritative instruments in the field of indigenous peoples' rights - the International Labor Organization Convention No. 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - indicate the main criteria for belonging to indigenous peoples: self-determination, traditional economic activities, close ties with the historical territory of residence, distinct languages and culture, the existence of their own decision-making institutions. ILO Convention No. 169, in its Article 1, paragraph 2, specifically notes that "Self-identification as indigenous or tribal shall be regarded as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups to which the provisions of this Convention apply".⁹

There is no doubt that the Karelians fully comply with these criteria. Like other peoples of the region, they exercise traditional economic activities: hunting, fishing, gathering. In the recent historical past, the northern Karelians also engaged in reindeer herding, but due to the tragic circumstances of the Second World War, this type of activity was lost. Karelian language, along with Saami, Nenets and Vepsian, belongs to the Uralic language family. Linguists distinguish three main dialects of the Karelian language: Karelian, Livvi and Lyydi. The uniqueness of the culture of Karelians is characterized by such elements as traditional yoig, oral tradition of chanting, which became the basis for the world famous epic poem "Kalevala", unique traditions of weaving and boatbuilding. There are NGO's of Karelians in Karelia, however, the Karelian Congress of the Republic of Karelia acts as the institution of people's self-government, and its executive body is the Council of Commissioners of the Congress of Karelians, whose members are elected every four years by the Congress delegates, in accordance with democratic traditions and with strict observance of the principle of equal geographical representation. The resolution of each Congress of Karelians emphasizes that the Karelians are an indigenous people. Resolutions of the VII and VIII Congresses of the Karelian Republics of the Republic of Karelia as a separate item reflect the desire of the Karelians to become part of the cooperation of the indigenous peoples of the Barents Euro-Arctic region.¹⁰

⁸ Доклад Специального докладчика ООН по правам коренных народов «Положение в области прав коренных народов в Российской Федерации», 2010. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/147/79/PDF/G1014779.pdf?OpenElement>

⁹ Конвенция Международной организации труда №169
http://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/iol169.shtml

¹⁰ Резолюция VII Съезда карелов Республики Карелия
<http://nationalkom.karelia.ru/assets/page-files/14/1379/Rezolyuciya-7-sezda-karelov.doc>

The application for joining the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples of the Barents Region was prepared by the Council of Commissioners of the Congress of Karelians of the Republic of Karelia in accordance with the decision of the Congress. This application is made on behalf of and applies exclusively to the Karelians of the Republic of Karelia. The entire territory of the Republic of Karelia is the territory of the historical residence of the Karelians. At the same time, the so-called places of compact residence of the Karelians are distinguished, where their number is the most dense and relatively high - these are the three national municipal districts: Kalevsky, Pryazhinsky and Olonetsky. It is also worth noting that, in accordance with the Presidential Decree of June 27, 2017, the three northernmost regions of the Republic of Karelia - Louhsky, Kemsy and Belomorsky - are included in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, in which one of their priorities is the protection of rights and the traditional way of life of indigenous peoples. All three districts are historically places of traditional residence and traditional crafts of the Karelians.

International recognition

The Karelian people is de facto an active participant in the international cooperation of indigenous peoples. Representatives of Karelians took part in the drafting process of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Today, the Karelian organizations participate in the activities of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Alexei Tsykarev, member of the Presidium of the Council of Commissioners of the Congress of Karelians of the Republic of Karelia, was twice (in 2013 and 2016) appointed by the UN Human Rights Council a member of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. One of the criteria for appointing to this post is belonging to indigenous peoples and authority in the community of indigenous peoples. Alexei Tsykarev enjoys the support of fellow experts and was appointed to the chairmanship of the Expert Mechanism (in 2015).¹¹

In 2017, the Karelian organizations acted as co-organizers of parallel events on the UN platforms. One of them was devoted to employment issues and the development of entrepreneurial activities of indigenous peoples¹², and the second, organized jointly with the organizations of the first nations of the United States, is dedicated to the prospects of 2019 declared by the UN General Assembly as the International Year of Indigenous Languages. Karelian experts in 2016 took an active part in the discussion that led to the proclamation of 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages, and are currently participating in the work of the International Steering Committee, led by UNESCO.

Karelian organizations implement joint projects with other indigenous peoples of the north. The Center for Support of Indigenous Peoples and Civic Diplomacy "Young Karelia", with the support of the Nordic Council of Ministers, is implementing the project "Indigenous peoples' and ethnic minorities' cooperation and networking increase facility in the Nordic countries and Northwest Russia", in which the Inuit

¹¹ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/EMRIP/Pages/Membership.aspx>

¹² <http://nuorikarjala.ru/motion/news/ustoychivyy-biznes-korennnykh-narodov-dolzhen-byt-osnovan-na-yazyke-i-kulture/>

Circumpolar Council (a branch in Greenland) participate.¹³ The aim of the project is to strengthen the exchange of best practices and knowledge among the indigenous peoples of the North.

The scientific and expert community also recognizes the Karelians as an indigenous people. In the Republic of Karelia two studies of the World Bank were conducted: "Integration of the indigenous youth of Russia in the labor market" and "Karelia. Sustainable local development based on cultural and historical identity." The focus of research was indigenous peoples of Karelia: Karelians and Vepsians.

The international organization Article 19, which defends the right to freedom of speech and information, supported in 2018 the preparation of the report "Indigenous peoples and the right to information"¹⁴. This report analyzes practices related to the possibilities of obtaining information by indigenous peoples on the example of Karelians and Vepsians.

In 2017 a study of the Arctic Council "Adaptation actions for the changing Arctic: perspectives from the Barents Region"¹⁵ was published, in which a chapter in the section "Prospects of Indigenous Peoples" is devoted to the problems of both Karelians and Vepsians of the Republic of Karelia.

Causes for applying for the Working Group

Karelians as the indigenous people of the Republic of Karelia overcomes the difficulties noted in the Action Plan of the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples of the Barents Region for 2016 – 2018. Karelians face the destructive activity of industrial companies, in particular the forestry sector, which adversely affects the ability of Karelians to conduct traditional economic activities in their places of residence. The Karelian people, as well as other indigenous peoples of the Barents region, are looking for opportunities to participate in the discussion on sustainable development, taking into account the need for economic growth in the Far North and the interests of indigenous peoples. VIII Congress of the Karelians of the Republic of Karelia in 2016 was devoted to the theme of sustainable development.

The Karelian movement fully shares the same priorities as other indigenous peoples of the Barents region: preservation of identity, revitalization and development of language and cultural heritage. Karelians are also driven by the desire to improve living standards and development opportunities within their own communities.

In accordance with the decisions of the VIII Congress of the Karelians of the Republic of Karelia, Karelians face the most urgent problems of preserving, revitalizing and expanding the spheres of application of the Karelian language, preserving cultural heritage for future generations and improving the socio-economic conditions of settlements. To achieve these goals, it is necessary to consistently work in the spheres of culture, education, public administration, access to information. The

¹³ <http://nuorikarjala.ru/en/motion/projects/usilenie-sotrudnichestva-i-setevogo-vzaimodeystviya-korenykh-narodov-i-natsionalnykh-menshinstv-v-s/>

¹⁴ <http://nuorikarjala.ru/motion/news/nichego-o-nas-bez-nas-dostup-k-informatsii-delaet-korenyye-narody-silnee/>

¹⁵ <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/2078>

Karelian movement realizes the importance of work not only at the local, regional and national levels, but also at the level of international cooperation through which, in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, indigenous peoples have the right to promote their rights. The Indigenous Peoples Working Group of the Barents Region is a unique international platform, which is heard by states and regions, members of the Barents Cooperation. That is why it is extremely important for the Karelians, as for the indigenous people of the region, to take part in the discussions and the decision-making process at the level of the Barents cooperation on issues that can affect them.

Arguments in favor of granting membership to the Karelians in the Working Group

The Council of Commissioners of the Congress of the Karelians is convinced that the positive consideration of the application of the Karelians on membership in the Working Group will strengthen the cooperation of the indigenous peoples of the Barents Region and strengthen their positions in the promotion of their rights and interests in the structure of the Barents Cooperation.

1. The Council of Commissioners of the Karelian Congress of the Republic of Karelia is an authoritative socio-political structure, acting on behalf of the Karelians of the Republic of Karelia, including in negotiations with the republican and federal authorities, as well as at the international level. According to the results of the Karelian congresses, the Government of the Republic of Karelia or the Head of the Republic of Karelia signs decrees on implementation of the decisions of the congress. Karelian organizations have the right of legislative initiative. The Council of Commissioners determines its representatives to the Council of representatives of the Karelians, Vepps and Finns of the Republic of Karelia under the Head of the Republic of Karelia. The high social status of the Congress of the Karelians and its authorized body will allow them to promote the interests of the indigenous peoples of the Barents Region in the authorities of the Republic of Karelia, and through it - in the Barents Regional Council. Thus, the Karelian movement will contribute to the achievement of one of the goals of the cooperation of the indigenous peoples of the Barents region - the achievement of equal conditions for development through the development of a dialogue between indigenous peoples with local, regional and national authorities.
2. The Karelian movement has experience and expertise on many issues that are a priority of the Barents cooperation of indigenous peoples. So in the Action Plan of the Working Party for 2016 - 2018. speak of language, culture, identity, traditional economic activity. The Karelian movement implements ambitious projects aimed at resolving these issues. In 2014 - 2015 gg. a network of ethno-cultural centers was formed, including ethno-cultural centers and organizations for preserving the heritage of the Karelians and Vepsians. Since 2014, on the initiative of the Congress of Karelians, the Language Resource Media Center of Finno-Ugric Peoples of Karelia is being created on the basis of the publishing house "Periodica". The Center will unite the efforts of the mass media and public organizations to expand the spheres of application of Karelian and Vepsian languages, including using information and communication technologies. A group of activists is working on translating the interface of the social network "Vkontakte" into Karelian

language and creating the Karelian Wikipedia. The inhabitants of the village of Vedlozero created the House of the Karelian language, which became the center of attraction of the cultural life of the whole region. The project of revitalization and early language immersion "Language Nest" is being implemented in the House of Karelian Language. The public organization "Union of the Karelian People" actively revives the traditions of the Karelian national *kyukkya* game. This is only a small list of successful projects demonstrating the Karelian people's expertise in these priority areas. Karelians are ready to actively share their experience and learn from the experience of other indigenous peoples of the Barents region. This aspect will become an important part of strengthening cooperation between the indigenous peoples of the Barents region, as described in paragraph 2.1. Action Plan for 2016 – 2018.

3. The Karelian movement is ready to contribute to the implementation of the priorities indicated in Part 2 of the Action Plan for 2016 - 2018. Stimulation of self-employment and entrepreneurial activity of indigenous peoples (development of cultural tourism and crafts), language and education (language nests, study and restoration of place names), use of innovative technologies for the development and teaching of languages (online courses, digitization of language material), well-being and affordable medicine (in 2016 an expert seminar on the health of indigenous peoples was held), the environment and climate change (working with the Government of Karelia and forest industry companies as part of voluntary certification), culture (organization of cultural events, promotion of epic and musical traditions, ethno-cultural centers), political cooperation (cooperation between NGO's, projects with indigenous organizations outside the Barents region), economy (contacts through the World Bank, capacity building of indigenous peoples in the region economy).
4. Representatives of Karelians are active participants of civil society and human rights community in the Republic of Karelia. In the capital and places of traditional residence, public organizations function, representatives of Karelians participate in public councils under the authorities, the Public Chamber of the Republic of Karelia, the expert public council under the Ombudsman for Human Rights in the Republic of Karelia. The struggle for the rights of indigenous peoples is an important part of the Action Plan of the Working Party for 2016 - 2018, and the Karelian movement is ready to contribute to this work. The inclusion of Karelians in the work of the Barents Cooperation will contribute to the strengthening of civil society and indigenous institutions in the region.
5. The strength of the Karelian movement is the active involvement in international cooperation and expertise in the field of public and cultural diplomacy. Representatives of Karelians work as experts in international organizations, including the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They take part in such relevant international processes as the announcement of the International Year of Indigenous Languages and a conference on climate change. The Karelian movement is at the root of the creation of the international and Russian Finno-Ugric movement. Leaders of the Karelian movement are on the leading positions in the Finno-Ugric cooperation. In 2009-2011, the representative of the Karelians headed the Youth Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples. Currently, the Chairperson of the Council of Commissioners of the Karelian Congress, Tatyana Kleerova

(previously working in diplomatic work, heading the Russian Center of Science and Culture in Helsinki), heads the Advisory Committee of Finno-Ugric Peoples, the executive body of the World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples, which unites all 24 Finno-Ugric and Samoyed people, including all indigenous peoples of the Barents cooperation. The World Congress is an authoritative platform for the development of a dialogue in which take part high-level leaders from the Russian Federation, as well as presidents of the three member countries of the European Union: Finland, Hungary and Estonia. These countries are part of the informal group of indigenous peoples' friends, which means that the site of Finno-Ugric cooperation can be used to promote the interests of the indigenous peoples of the Barents region. Expertise of Karelians in the issues of international cooperation will strengthen the participation of the indigenous peoples of the Barents Region in discussions at international venues, will allow to jointly implement international projects, and initiate new topics and discussions. The Karelian movement is ready to use its partner network around the world to strengthen the international cooperation of the Working Group.

6. A large number of Karelian experts work in scientific and educational organizations, such as the Institute of Language, Literature and History of the Karelian Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Petrozavodsk State University, the Karelian Branch of the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration under the President of the Russian Federation, the Republican terminology commission under the Head of the Republic of Karelia. Scientific and expert potential of Karelians can be used it in the work of the Working Group for the strengthening of its expert and analytical capacity. Participation of Karelian experts will contribute to the formation and dissemination of reliable information about the social, economic and cultural situation of the indigenous peoples of the region.
7. The Karelian people, like other peoples of the Barents region, are owners of traditional knowledge that can be used in the work of the Working group.
8. The Karelian movement shares the values of cooperation of the indigenous peoples of the Barents region: friendship and cooperation based on equality, coexistence and tolerance between peoples. Due to the inclusion of Karelians in the Working Group, the cooperation of the indigenous peoples of the Barents Region will become more inclusive and provide a more complete picture of what is happening in the region, which will make it possible to take more effective decisions. This will also allow to take into account the interests of all indigenous peoples in the Barents region, which will strengthen solidarity, dialogue and interethnic harmony. The Karelian movement is ready to contribute to the development of these values and principles.