

Saami Council

Organization: Saami Council

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Description The Saami Council is an umbrella organization representing eight major Saami organizations from Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. Established in 1956 as the Nordic Saami Council, the mandate of the organization is to promote Saami rights, interests, and culture locally, nationally, and internationally. In 1992, the Kola Saami Association (Russia), was accepted as a member to the Saami Council. Until the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the cross-border collaboration with the Russian Saami was very difficult if not impossible.

The current activities of the Saami Council include Arctic environmental issues, human rights issues, cultural affairs, and international collaboration with other Indigenous peoples. The Saami Council also works very closely with the elected Saami Parliaments and the Saami Parliamentary Council, a collaborative body of the three Saami Parliaments.

The Saami Council's participation in the international Indigenous rights movement goes back to the early 1970s. It was one of the forming members of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples established in Port Alberni, BC, Canada, in 1976. The Saami Council is recognized as a non-governmental organization with consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council and has participated in the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations since its establishment in 1982. One of the Saami Council's most recent activities is collaboration with indigenous organizations particularly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The focus of this collaboration is on capacity-building of indigenous organizations and communities.

The highest decision-making body in the Saami Council is the Saami Conference that convenes every fourth year. Member organizations send their delegations to the Conference that elects fifteen plenary members for four years (four from Sweden, five from Norway, four from Finland, and two from Russia). These members choose the President and three Vice-Presidents among themselves. The President and the three Vice-Presidents (one from each country) form the Executive Board of the Saami Council. The Saami Council administration consists of the Secretary General, Secretary of Cultural Affairs, Administrative Secretary and Treasurer. The Saami Council's office is located in Ohcejohka (Utsjoki), Northern Finland.

The Saami Council is one of the eight Permanent Participants in the Arctic Council. The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental forum on Arctic issues

established in 1996. Permanent Participant is a special status in the forum reserved for selected organizations of Indigenous peoples' living in the Arctic.

Suggested Reading: **Saami Council website.** www.saamicouncil.net (accessed 10 April 2006).

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