

Statement from the Sami Church Council on industrial development of wind power

The Sami Church Council of Church of Norway refers to the 28 May ministers' appeal where serious concerns were raised about the consequences of intensive wind power development for Sámi areas of settlement, for human life, for nature – for all life in affected areas. This not only applies to areas where permits have already been granted, but also to areas where permit applications are pending; areas of particular concern are Øyfellet/Vesterfjella, Fosen, Rásttigáisa, Rødfjellet/Kvitfjellet og Sállán/Sørøya. The Sami Church Council appreciates your engagement and initiative, which reflects the desire to preserve the foundations for Sámi cultural survival.

With this statement, the Sami Church Council underlines that the development of wind power is a threatens human life and culture in an extended sense; this deals with the very foundations for the survival of Sámi life and culture. Development of wind power often accompanies other encroachments, making the consequences insurmountable for Sámi society as a whole.

There has been increasing knoweldge about the negative consquences of wind power, which both decision-makers and others have been made aware. We would like to remind those who grant permits that it is always possible to reverse course in these cases.

We have been witnessing for a long time that granters of permits have not adequately taken account of the legal status, customary rights, or needs of the Sámi people. Thus, access to lands and natural resources – as the material basis for Sámi culture – are not safeguarded, despite the fact that section §108 of the Constitution ought to safeguard these rights. The paragraph makes explicit the state's obligation to facilitate conditions for the Sami to safeguard and develop their language(s), their culture and their social life. The UN Declaration on Civil and Political Rights, together with ILO 169, further affirm these obligations.

With this practice the state has created conditions for the extensive destruction of lands in Sámi areas while the Indigenous people, users of the areas, have not been sufficently consulted. As a result, the Sami Church Council is concerned that confidence in the work of Truth and Reconciliation Commision has been weakened.

The Sami Church Council also emphasizes that the protection of Creation is central to the mission of the Church. We, humans, are called to protect all of Creation. Deep within the Christian faith is the recognition that humans are created in the image of God. Therefore, Church of Norway has a great responsibility to address the rights of Indigenous peoples, not only as laid down by Christian belief, but also on the basis of obligations through a number of measures that have been taken. Through the joint church's international engagement for Indigenous peoples, a number of binding statements have been made in support of Indigenous rights. Church of Norway has been a driving force behind these efforts.

The Sami Church Council hereby supports opposition to the construction of wind power in Sami areas. The diaconal mission is to support the spiritual and material needs of the congregation. We encourage concegrations in Sami areas to familiarize themselves with how encroachments in natural areas affect their congregations, local communities, and individuals. As followers of Christ, we are called to fight for human dignity and rights, as well as to fight against injustice.

In this context, that means reminding decision-makers of their responsibility to ensure that vulnerable groups are not subjected to greater struggles than the rest of society.

Statement from the extraordinary meeting of the Sami Church Council, 17 June 2020