

**Questions from Human Rights Council Elections Pledging Event 2021**  
**Written responses by Finland**  
**8<sup>th</sup> October 2021**

**Questions addressed specifically to Finland**

1. Amnesty Finland: Finland has not ratified International Labor Organization Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Will it ratify these treaties during its possible Human Rights Council membership?

Response:

Finland is committed to ensuring a high-level protection of human rights and to the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

A Government Bill on the ratification of the ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries was introduced to Parliament in November 2014. However, the Bill was withdrawn in January 2019, since it was outdated, and it no longer was possible to give new proposals to Parliament, since the electoral term was ending. The withdrawal of the proposal did not include a statement concerning the possible ratification of the Convention at a later stage. The current Government has decided to examine the possibilities of ratifying the Convention.

Finland is working on the ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The corresponding Government's proposal is scheduled to be given to Parliament in spring 2022. The Government proposes that Finland should recognize the competence of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances in full.

**Questions posed to all candidate States:**

1. *Outright International*: The Human Rights Council continues to be a vital resource for LGBTI communities to bring visibility to the human rights violations they face based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics. However, questions related to LGBTI persons are also unfortunately highly politicized at the Council. How would the candidates present today ensure that politics does not get in the way of promoting and protecting the human rights of LGBTI persons?

Response:

Finland is fully committed to bringing visibility to and addressing human rights violations on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression of sex characteristics. There must be zero tolerance for harassment, discrimination or violence of LGBTIQ+ persons.

As a sign of our commitment, Finland has for decades, together with Sweden and with the support of other Nordic countries, presented in the General Assembly a resolution on the prohibition of extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. The resolution urges all states to the effective protection of the right to life of all persons, and prompt, exhaustive and impartial investigations into all killings, including those targeted because of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Finland fully supports and works for that the Human Rights Council takes action to protect persons from violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity so that LGBTIQ+ persons can enjoy human rights. We are a member of the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Group of Friends in Geneva and Finland looks forward to joining the UN LGBTI Core Group with a Partner from the Global South. We also lend our strong support to the mandate and work of the Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity. Finland continues to provide considerable funding to LGBTIQ actors and other groups defending their rights globally.

2. *CIVICUS*: What are the steps you will take to ensure full NGO participation in the Council, its mechanisms and resolutions, and to engage with national and international civil society as a Council member?

Response:

A vibrant civil society is a vital element of societies respectful of human rights. Finland strongly supports and defends the participation of NGO's in the work of the Human Rights Council and in the UN's work more broadly.

We will make every effort to ensure their full and meaningful participation in the Council's work and engage both with international and national NGO's. Finland also supports financially human rights work by international NGO's and works for the protection of human rights defenders in line with our national guidelines.

Finland has zero tolerance for reprisals or harassment of NGO's representatives, human rights defenders or anyone else who addresses the Council.

3. *Human Rights Watch*: NGOs have been banned from UN headquarters since March 2020. Although UN employees, diplomats & media representatives (resident correspondents) can now enter UN headquarters (with restrictions), NGOs remain under a total ban. What will you do to ensure COVID-19 isn't used as a convenient excuse for those who are not fans of civil society to bar NGOs from UN headquarters? Will you support allowing accredited NGO representatives to participate in UN headquarters activities in line with all UN guidelines and restrictions like other UN stakeholders?

Response:

A vibrant civil society is a vital element of societies respectful of human rights. Finland strongly supports and defends the participation of NGO's in the work of the Human Rights Council and in the UN's work more broadly. It is important that accredited NGO representatives can participate in UN headquarters activities and in line with other UN stakeholders. We have and we will speak in favour of NGO access and participation at UN headquarters. All measures restricting access and participation must be proportionate and reasonable. As a practical example, as the President of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD, Finland emphasizes the importance of civil society participation to the conference. This means including civil society from planning to the execution of the conference.

4. *Child Rights Connect*: What are your plans to mainstream and advance child rights at the Human Rights Council?

Response:

Finland pays particular attention to the rights of girls and children in vulnerable situations such as children with disabilities. Children's right to inclusive, quality education, their right to age-appropriate sex education, their right to a non-violent childhood, freedom from child marriage and their right to participate in decision-making affecting them are among issues that are important from Finland's perspective. As a member of the European Union Finland continues its strong support to the Rights of the Child resolution presented by the European Union and the Latin American countries.

5. *Permanent Mission of the Principality of Liechtenstein to the United Nations:* Ensuring accountability for human rights violations should be a priority for all States, especially Human Rights Council members. The support of the ACT Code of Conduct is an important factor for Liechtenstein's support of a candidature, in addition to its human rights record, pledges and commitments. To what extent are you prioritising strengthening accountability and supporting the ACT Code of Conduct?

Response:

As an active member of the ACT Group, we are very supportive of and have joined the ACT Code of Conduct. Finland will continue to work actively towards ending impunity for the most serious crimes under international law and to bring justice to and support victims and survivors of such crimes.

It is extremely important that the Human Rights Council addresses serious human rights violations globally, including when they may amount to international crimes, and sets in such situations monitoring by independent experts. The Human Rights Council's work can in the best scenarios support the work of the UN Security Council. Finland will work towards ensuring that the Human Rights Council takes into account the recommendations of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the independent human rights mechanisms of the UN and civil society working on human rights to address serious situations.

In fulfilling its mandate to maintain international peace and security, including ensuring accountability for human rights violations and abuses, the UN Security Council should take into account the recommendations by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Procedures.

6. *Genoveva Sotirova (Twitter user):* What are your plans in order to improve access to healthcare to low-income individuals?

Response:

Finland pays special attention to those in most vulnerable situations. We support the work of the Human Rights Council and the dedicated Special Rapporteur on the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Finland is a longtime financial supporter of the work of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and extreme poverty as well as the OHCHR's work on technical assistance and capacity building on the country level through our funding of the Voluntary Fund on Technical Cooperation in the field of Human Rights. We also lend financial support to international NGO's working in the field of economic, social and cultural rights.

7. *Genoveva Sotirova (Twitter user)*: What is your plan to promote the right of access to education of Muslim and Roma women refugees?

Response:

Finland pledges to support the right of all persons to access equitable and inclusive education of the highest attainable quality, with a particular focus on girls, persons with disabilities and those in the most vulnerable situations. We give special attention to the youth and education for all in the global response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Questions posed and answered during the event**

1. *Human Rights Watch*: NGOs have been banned from UN headquarters since March 2020. Although UN employees, diplomats & media representative (resident correspondents) can now enter UN headquarters (with restrictions), NGOs remain under a total ban. What will you do to ensure Covid isn't used as a convenient excuse for those who are not fans of civil society to bar NGOs from UN headquarters? Will you support allowing accredited NGO representative to participate in UN headquarters activities in line with all UN guidelines and restrictions like other UN stakeholders?

Response:

A vibrant civil society is a vital element of societies respectful of human rights. Finland strongly supports and defends the participation of NGO's in the work of the Human Rights Council and in the UN's work more broadly. It is important that accredited NGO representatives can participate in UN headquarters activities and in line with other UN stakeholders. We have and we will speak in favour of NGO access and participation at UN headquarters. All measures restricting access and participation must be proportionate and reasonable. As a practical example, as the President of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD, Finland emphasizes the importance of civil society participation to the conference. This means including civil society from planning to the execution of the conference.

2. *Amnesty Finland*: Finland's pledge consists of many highly relevant commitments including defending universality of human rights, paying special attention to rights of women and marginalized groups and addressing country situations. Will Finland lead by example and take urgent action to reform legislation on legal gender recognition, the so-called Trans Act, on which Finland has received numerous international recommendations, including in the Universal Periodic Review process?

Response:

Finland is strongly committed in safeguarding the rights of all LGBTIQ+ persons. We provide considerable support to LGBTIQ+ persons and groups living in difficult situations around the world. However, we acknowledge that the situation is not perfect in Finland.

A working group is preparing a legislative proposal regarding transgender persons (so-called Trans Act). The Government of Finland aims to submit its proposal to Parliament in spring 2022. The new legislation will strengthen the fulfilment of individual's right to self-determination required by international human rights agreements. Finland will take into account the views of international human rights bodies as well as the international and domestic human rights organisations during the drafting process.

3. *Joseph Alafac (Twitter user)*: Will you commit to repeal the blasphemy law in the Criminal Code and respect and advocate for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion?

Response:

Finland is committed to both freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief.

Finland has received a recommendation from the Human Rights Committee on this matter in March. We maintain a continuous constructive dialogue with the UN treaty bodies and will also review this recommendation as part of a broader assessment of the implementation of our human rights obligations.