

OSCE – HDIM 2014

Working session 11 – Rights of persons belonging to national minorities  
Intervention done by - Jungle Svonni from Shamanism I Norden NGO, Sweden

My name is Jungle Svonni, and I am a Sami shaman. We Sami are the indigenous people of northern Scandinavia and the Kola Peninsula. Currently our land is occupied by Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. My family migrates with our reindeers between Sweden in winter and Norway in summer.

Our ancestral culture and religion is shamanic. However, the colonizing countries, like Sweden and Norway, have for centuries acted to exterminate our religion. By cutting our spiritual connection to nature through shamanism, the connection of all our culture is lost.

Practicing shamanism has been illegal for centuries. Any cultural expressions related to shamanism, such as joik (the sami way of singing) or having a shamanic drum was severely punished, even by death. The heavy persecution resulted in the near extinction of shamanism among us. The persecutions of our roots have created social marginalization, a high rate of suicides and environmental problems, due to a decreased understanding for nature.

My grandfather and great grandfather were all shamans, but without any possibility to know or practice it fully. As a child I realized that this destructive situation must be fixed, if we Sami people are going to have any future. About 10 years ago I left on a journey to the Peruvian and Ecuadorian Amazon, to rediscover my shamanic roots. I stayed with the native people for eight years, learning my own culture. In the end I worked as a shaman on a large healing center, where we among other things were curing drug addictions with great success.

Two years ago I moved back, to share the shaman knowledge with my people. Swedish authorities arrested and jailed me for 18 days. They confiscated my sacred plant medicine, the San Pedro cactus, and I was accused of smuggling narcotics - mescaline. The San Pedro plant is completely legal and can be bought in any Swedish flower shop. It was only the shamanic context that triggered the judicial to actions and imprisonment. Media portrayed me as a criminal, fuelled by ignorant and false statements from the prosecutor. Surprisingly it took the judge one and a half year to find that the legal San Pedro has nothing to do with mescaline or the drug market. I became the first Sami shaman ever to win against the Swedish authorities, without denying being a shaman. But the core problem remains. One of the most important shamanic and natural sacraments Ayahuasca, is still not fully legalized.

Today shamanism is supposed to be legal in Sweden and Norway, protected by the fundamental rights. In reality shamanism is still persecuted. It is only accepted as a "play" for eccentric adults. If it is serious, if you gather knowledge from the nature as our forefathers did and use the natural plants sacraments, you can still today get arrested and imprisoned. The Swedish authorities would use the excuse that you allegedly have violated their narcotic law. But the shamanic ceremonies of Sami people have no connection to the drug problems of Swedish society. What about our human rights to search our roots and practice our religion, shamanism?

Today, the Sami people are prevented by law to educate us directly from nature through natural medicine. Plant medicine is a fundamental part of shamanism and to prevent people to practice their traditional religion is a serious violation of human rights and minority rights.

The wounds on my people are so deep after centuries of persecution that we must turn to our shaman brothers in the Amazon for our cultural survival. For centuries we were forced to practice a foreign religion, and speak a foreign language, our own being forbidden. Our mountains are destroyed by foreign mining companies, the liken necessary for our reindeers are polluted by a foreign society. Our forests are cut down by foreign companies with foreign technology. But WE are NOT allowed to share the shamanic plant knowledge from our shaman brothers and sisters, which we so badly need to recover our own culture.

I was imprisoned and prosecuted. The reason was not the fully legal San Pedro itself. The prosecutor tried to incriminate me because I would be used in my Sami shaman practice. The human rights violations in my case show the arrogance and ignorance of Swedish authorities. Sami shamanism is finally reawakening after centuries of oppression. Sweden must reconsider how to deal with it, in order to hinder further violations of our fundamental rights!

***Recommendations:***

The Nordic Shamanic Association (?) recommend Swedish authorities to adapt their judicial practice so it does not violate the fundamental rights of the Same, when it comes to shamanic practice.

The Nordic Shamanic Association (?), recommend authorities and Civil Society in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia to support a thorough investigation on the violations against the Same people and its consequences today.

The Nordic Shamanic Association - Shamanism I Norden - recommend OSCE and its member states to properly investigate how the law can be adapted to fulfill its purpose in fighting drug problems in society, without hindering shamanic practices with natural plants.