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Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee

The National Forum for Cooperation of Religions in Finland (CORE Forum) submits this briefing to the United Nations Human Rights Committee ahead of its examination of the seventh periodic report of Finland at its 131st session in March 2021.

CORE Forum fosters social peace and religious freedom by promoting interfaith dialogue and mutual respect. Its key values include equality and freedom of religion. CORE Forum's founding member communities are the Central Council of Jewish Communities in Finland, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the Finnish Ecumenical Council, the Finnish Islamic Congregation, and the Islamic Council of Finland. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Finland and the Finnish Buddhist Union are observer members of the Forum.

1. Hate speech, hate crimes

Increase in hate speech and intolerance in society: (a) hate crimes, harassment and hate speech, including online (especially on social media) and in political discourse, against members of ethnic and religious minorities such as Roma and Muslims; (b) a rise in anti-Semitic hate speech online; and (c) a proliferation of fake news outlets and Internet trolling factories that encourage and contribute to hate speech.

The Finnish legislation incorrectly transposes hate speech inciting to violence and fail to criminalize hate speech when addressed to individual members of a group defined by reference to race, color, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin. In addition, Finland fails to criminalize the specific forms of hate speech, namely the public condoning, denial or gross trivialization of international crimes and the Holocaust. Finland has also failed to ensure that the criminal offences concerning racism and xenophobia can be investigated and prosecuted without a report or an accusation made by the victim.

CORE Forum recommends that Finnish authorities urgently reform the applicable acts in order to remedy the abovementioned shortcomings.

2. Slaughtering of animals

Slaughter without stunning has been prohibited in Finland since 1996. Under section 33b of the Animal Welfare Act (247/1996), a special method of slaughter where bleeding is started simultaneously with stunning is permitted for religious reasons.

Members of religious communities have had to rely on imported foods. Some halal slaughtering is practiced, but even there the animal is stunned before bleeding which does not meet the conditions of Halal slaughter. The Kosher slaughter method has not been used during the validity of the current Act. Religious communities and NGOs consider it important that religious minorities can obtain food products that are compatible with their religious dietary restrictions without having to import the products outside of Finland.

CORE Forum recommends that Finnish authorities refrain from reforming the Animal Welfare Act in the manner it has tried to do in 2018 by trying to prohibit both Kosher and Halal slaughter. Instead the authorities should take measures to enable such forms of slaughter.

The National Forum for Cooperation of Religions in Finland (CORE Forum)

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