Rights of persons belonging to minorities (art. 1 and 27)

Question 25

The municipalities in Sweden have a large degree of autonomy. This means that it is not possible to prescribe in detail how they should deal with a matter. In terms of the exercise of public authorities in a municipality, they are of course bound by the same rules that apply to all authorities in Sweden. The issue of effective Sami participation in the decision-making process is being considered in the bill on Sami policy due in March 2010.

The Government has given the Sámi Parliament the task of compiling a draft handbook for how municipalities and other public administrations can draw more attention to the Sámi language in practice, improve the Sámi language skills of employees and increase the general
public’s use of Sámi in contacts with municipalities and other administrations. The handbook was presented to the Government in January 2008. The Sámi Parliament has also initiated a drive to establish contact with municipalities in the South Sámi region in order to disseminate information about Sámi as a national minority language and offer the municipalities support and help on the issue.

Question 26

The Sami Parliament has taken over a large number of tasks related to the administration of reindeer husbandry from the Swedish Board of Agriculture and the county administrative boards. The Sami Parliament is now the central administrative authority for reindeer husbandry. This means that the Board no longer handles any tasks in this area. The county administrative boards still decide on the maximum number of reindeer permitted and various land leases. A proposal to transfer these tasks as well received strong criticism at consultation, and it was judged that they were difficult to transfer because many aspects involve the exercise of public authority in relation to third parties. This would mean that the organisation of the Sami Parliament would probably have to be changed to permit influence from non-Sami. This was seen as too great a change, and in any case there was no complete proposal concerning this part of the inquiry. The first step was therefore the reform that was implemented. This will be evaluated, and then hopefully be followed by further reforms intended to increase Sami influence in issues that directly affect them.

The Ministry of Agriculture deals with Sami issues because it deals with reindeer husbandry issues. Just like farming, reindeer husbandry is regarded as an agricultural industry. Reindeer husbandry is also perhaps the most important component of the Sami culture, together with language. Reindeer husbandry issues have formed the bulk of the subject matter of Sami policy inquiries in areas such as hunting and fishing, the boundaries for reindeer husbandry areas, etc. Land issues can be regarded as the most difficult to resolve in the area of Sami policy, and this is why it has been deemed appropriate for the same authority to deal with reindeer husbandry issues and Sami issues. However, the Ministry of Agriculture has no responsibility for Sami school issues or for language issues or Sami culture. These are handled by the relevant ministries.

Question 27

The Boundary Delimitation Committee’s report and the Hunting and Fishing Rights Inquiry will be dealt with in the upcoming Sami Bill. The annual meeting of the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish ministers responsible for Sami issues and the presidents of the Sami parliaments was held in Helsinki on 12 November 2008. Matters discussed at the meeting included the continuing preparation of a Nordic Sami convention. It was agreed to continue the process during the Norwegian Presidency in 2009. A proposal will then be drafted on how to negotiate a Nordic Sami convention. Emphasis will be placed on the process, participation and basis for negotiation, as well as the timetable of topics for negotiation.

Question 28

The Government presumes with respect to this question that the Committee is referring to the specific national minority language legislation, the Acts (1999:1175 and 1999:1176) concerning the right to use Sámi, Finnish and Meänkieli in dealings with public authorities and
courts. These language laws came about as a consequence of Sweden’s ratification of the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Framework Convention) and the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages (Language Charter). The Swedish Government’s work to improve the implementation of the Language Charter and the Framework Convention is an ongoing process.

The language laws concern the right to use Sámi, Finnish or Meänkieli in dealings with public authorities and courts on matters related to the exercise of public authority and also the right to pre-school and elderly care wholly or partly in one of these three languages. The application of these laws is limited to certain geographical areas where Sámi, Finnish and Meänkieli have a long tradition, the administrative districts consisting of seven municipalities in Norrbotten, namely Arjeplog, Gällivare, Jokkmokk, Haparanda, Kiruna, Pajala and Övertorneå.

The Norrbotten County Administrative Board has the task of monitoring the application of these Acts and is also responsible for distributing government grants to municipalities and county councils in accordance with the Ordinance (2000:86) on government grants for measures to support the use of Sámi, Finnish and Meänkieli. The County Administrative Board reports annually to the Government on how government funding is being distributed to municipalities and county councils and on the results and costs of regional initiatives.

Information to the general public concerning these Acts is given on the Norrbotten County Administrative Board website, the Government’s website and the Government’s human rights website. The Government has also produced a brochure on the Acts and a fact sheet on the national minorities and minority languages, both of which are still being distributed free of charge.

In the budget bill for 2009 the Government proposes that a Government bill on a reformed policy on national minorities will be presented to the Riksdag in March 2009. The aim is to present solutions for improved possibilities for the use of national minority languages with public authorities and courts.

Alongside this, children from the national minorities have the right to study their minority languages in school, no matter where in the country they live. Mother-tongue instruction and bilingual instruction play an important role in supporting and strengthening the minority languages.

The Sámi people are acknowledged both as a national minority and as an indigenous people. Within a certain geographical area, Sámi children have the right to undertake their compulsory school attendance in Sámi schools instead of regular compulsory schools. The education in Sámi schools has a Sámi angle and comprises years 1–6. The education corresponds to the first six years of compulsory school. Sámi children can also obtain an integrated Sámi education in their compulsory school if they wish.
In order to increase the number of minority language teachers, the Swedish Government has commissioned the Teacher Education Inquiry (U2007:10) to propose new degree requirements for the teacher education degree for teachers of minority languages. Luleå University of Technology has a special assignment to offer teacher education directed towards Sámi, Meänkieli and Finnish language teaching in primary and secondary school. The teacher education directed towards minority language teaching is a specialisation within the ordinary teacher education programme. This means that the Government has gone one step further and decided that this education is especially important.

As an addition to the Sámi, Finnish and Meänkieli language education being offered as a special assignment by certain universities, in 2006 the Government initiated and financially supported higher education in Jiddish and Romani chib. As a result, higher education in all minority languages is now being offered by several different higher education institutions.

Dissemination of information relating to the Covenant and the Optional Protocol (art. 2) Question 29

Information about the Covenant and the Optional Protocol can be found on the Swedish Government’s human rights website at [www.manskligarattigheter.se](http://www.manskligarattigheter.se). The website includes various forms of information regarding human rights issues including Swedish reports to the various international bodies that review individual States’ observance of human rights as well as concluding observations from such bodies. A project was started in 2006 aimed at further adapting the website for people with disabilities and translating sections to minority languages spoken in Sweden. The website is an important tool for the Swedish Government to spread information about human rights issues. More than 50,000 people visit the website each month, including public officials, students and the public at large. Sweden is one of the most computer dense countries in the world. A computer can be found in private homes always as often as a radio or a television set. Of persons born in Sweden 84 per cent use the Internet on a regular basis. The corresponding number for persons born outside of Europe is 75 per cent. Human rights issues are addressed on a regular basis within the National Police, the National Courts Administration and the Prison and Probation Service in their education programmes. Education in human rights is obligatory for all new prosecutors. In addition, the Centre of Excellence in Malmö has arranged seminars on Human Rights issues.