

Human rights situation in Finland

Miesten tasa-arvo ry (Men's Equality in Finland) is a non-governmental and politically non-aligned organization. Miesten tasa-arvo ry was established in 2008. The purpose of this organization is to increase equality between men and women in the Finnish society. Because the rights and problems of men have been often forgotten by the Finnish authorities in their quest for greater gender equality, Miesten tasa-arvo ry specifically concentrates on promoting the equality and human rights of men. In order to achieve equality in the Finnish society, it is necessary to make sure that everyone, regardless of gender, has the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities. In other words, everybody should be treated equally and nobody should be discriminated against.

On the whole, the human rights situation in Finland is pretty good. There are, however, some issues that need to be addressed..

Constitution

Unlike the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Chapter 26), the Finnish constitution does not strictly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, language, religion or some other ground like that. The Finnish constitution states that discrimination based on such grounds is not acceptable, unless there is a "good reason". It is not clearly specified what counts as a "good reason", which means that there is a lot of room for different interpretations.

In order to seriously promote equality and human rights, Finland should take a tougher and more definitive stance against discrimination. The Finnish constitution should be revised accordingly.

Conscription

The Finnish conscription system is a clear example of discrimination in practice. Jehovah's Witnesses are exempt from the conscription because of their faith, the inhabitants of the Aland Islands are exempt because they live on those demilitarized islands, and women are exempt because they are women. Men, on the other hand, are forced to complete either military or non-military service, whether they want to do so or not. This is a clear-cut case of discrimination against men. In practice, this conscription system amounts to forced labor, and if a man does not agree to do this forced labor, he will be sentenced to jail.

The Finnish authorities should admit that the present conscription system causes serious human rights problems. They should try to find a better and more equal way to organize the national defense. In any case, an adequate compensation should be given to all those who serve their country in the army.

Rights of Children and Fathers

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child acknowledges that every child has the right to be raised by his or her parents. There are a lot of children in Finland who are not able to exercise this right, mainly because they cannot keep in touch with their father or because they do not even know their father. Therefore it is vital to be able to find out the identity of the father more easily. It should be possible to establish fatherhood with the aid of DNA tests even when the mother is against it. The Finnish law on fatherhood should be reformed so that the best interest of the child and the rights of men could be protected more efficiently.

In a case of a divorce, the authorities should make everything in their power to ensure that the child can maintain a fully functioning and meaningful relationship with both of his or her parents. This means that even if the children live mostly with their mother, their father should be seen and treated as an equal parent. The child support payments should be kept at a reasonable level, especially when the child lives close to 50% with the "distant parent" (a concept that has been invented by the bureaucracy). In the future, equally shared parenthood, not just equally divided guardianship of the child, should be the norm in divorce cases.

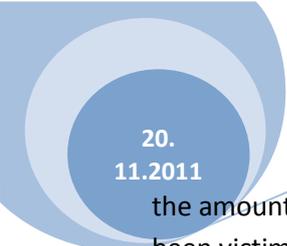
Circumcision for Non-Medical Reasons

Circumcision of underage people for non-medical reasons should be strictly banned in Finland. It is a serious violation against human rights to mutilate the genital organs of a defenseless baby just for religious or cultural reasons. An unmedical circumcision is a risky and painful operation that can cause permanent physical and mental damage to its victim, regardless the sex of the child. The Finnish authorities strictly condemn the circumcision of baby girls, but for some reason they are quite happy to allow the medically unnecessary circumcisions of baby boys to go on. There is after all, no ethical rationale for distinguishing between female and male genital alteration.

Non-medical circumcision cannot be justified by religious beliefs or cultural tradition. There is already a ban on the corporal punishment of children, for example, although the Bible clearly calls for corporal punishment of children. Besides, the faith of the parents should not be used as an excuse for the maltreatment of children and the neglect of their right of self-determination. Instead, all children should have the right to be treated equally. Every child should be protected from violence by the authorities.

Violence against Men

In Finland, violence against women is seen as a huge human rights issue. Violence against men is seen as a minor inconvenience, just another part of the daily life. Men are just expected to deal with it. Although most of the victims of violence are male, the Finnish government only actively campaigns against violence against women. If they really wanted to reduce the violence against women, they should also try to reduce



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the amount of violence committed against men, because most men and women who act violently have been victims of violence themselves. The vicious circle of violence cannot be broken, if the whole circle is not taken into account.

Even though 50 per cent of domestic violence is committed by women, the Finnish authorities still like to pretend that in the domestic sphere violence is exclusively committed by men against women. The Finnish equality policy is based on this fantasy and not the facts. The result of this folly is unfortunate: when men complain of the domestic violence that they have suffered from, the authorities do not take their claims seriously. Sometimes the male victims of domestic violence are openly ridiculed.

Violence against men should be taken seriously and it should be seen as a human rights issue. The Finnish authorities should make it clear for everyone that they do not tolerate violence against men any more than violence against women.

Male Couples

As surrogacy has been banned in Finland, gay couples do not have any chance of getting children of their own. This puts them on an unequal footing with other couples, because the Finnish legislation allows artificial insemination to be used for both heterosexual and lesbian couples. Gay couples also find that adoption is pretty much out of the question for them, whereas it is an option for other couples. These issues should be investigated thoroughly in order to find more equal solutions.

Freedom of Speech

In recent years, freedom of speech has been curtailed in Finland. A lot of politicians want to ban the so-called "hate speech" altogether. Nobody seems to mind, however, when men are subjected to vicious, hateful, untruthful and sexist attacks. In other words, there is a double standard: you can say anything you want about men, but you cannot say similar things about women or ethnic minorities for example. This is another case of discrimination against men. The rules should be the same for everyone, and because the freedom of speech is an important human right, it should be expanded, not limited.