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SÁMI REINDEER HERDERS BRING A SUIT AGAINST STATE LOGGING

Finnish state forestry enterprise Metsähallitus has started logging in forests crucial for reindeer herding livelihood in the village of Nellim, in the municipality of Inari. Logging is taking place inside of an especially important area for reindeer herding; a feeding fence.

Metsähallitus has been informed in advance about the great importance of the area currently being logged. The logging was started without prior consultation or even notification to the reindeer herders. The attorney of the reindeer herders, Ms. Johanna Ojala, has not, despite of numerous requests, received a notification of the logging beforehand.

The reindeer herders in Nellim will bring a suit against the logging. To safeguard their rights, a request for precautionary measure has been delivered to the district court in Lapland. In the request the court is being asked to order Metsähallitus to stop the logging immediately.

The court has given an urgent decision on October 26 in which it orders Metsähallitus to stop the logging. However, Metsähallitus has announced that they will continue the logging, because they have not officially received the court order. In addition to this, the attorney of Metsähallitus has announced that they will demand recognizance from the reindeer herders, even though Metsähallitus is very well informed about the fact that the reindeer herders have no economical possibilities to deliver a collateral. Metsähallitus has admitted that they are aware of the court's decision.

Metsähallitus must stop logging in Nellim in order to guarantee a fair trial for reindeer herders. Continuing logging in areas that are under the complaint will in practise trash the reindeer herders' rights, as the court case can take years, and during this time Metsähallitus can destroy all the important grazing forests.

If the logging proceeds, the reindeer herding livelihood will in the long run be destroyed from Nellim area. In short term, the logging means reduction to profitability of reindeer herding.

The Finnish Sámi Reindeer Herders Association denounces the activities of Metsähallitus in Inari. Metsähallitus stopped the negotiations with the Sámi reindeer herders and the Sámi Parliament in June by a unilateral decision. It started logging in the reindeer grazing forests in August in Hammastunturi reindeer herding co-operative.

In October, the logging has expanded into three more co-operatives. At the moment Metsähallitus is logging in Kessi, Paadarskaidi and Nellim areas. In Nellim, several logging plans have been marked in the forests.

- We appeal into the Finnish government, so that Metsähallitus would be put into order. It just cannot be right that the Sámi reindeer herding, which is protected through legislation and agreements, is continuously being driven into the corner without anybody helping, says chairman Juha Magga.

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