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Total Arrogance from Rally Sweden: “I Chose to Override the Sámi Community”

We accuse Rally Sweden, the Västerbotten County Administrative Board, and Umeå Municipality. You bear a heavy responsibility for what has happened in connection with the recent World Rally Championship event – for the hatred and threats against reindeer herders and Sámi children, for the escalating racism on social media, and for the tragedy that resulted in three reindeer being killed on a forest road in Rans Sámi village.

"When the County Administrative Board, which governs the decision-making, and the media, which controls the flow of information, fail to clearly defend the Indigenous people's human rights and their ability to practice their traditional livelihoods, the consequences are severe. Hate crimes against reindeer increase, threats against reindeer herders escalate, and the Sámi people face even more harassment and persecution. The silence from public authorities becomes a tacit approval of the ongoing oppression," writes artist and reindeer herder Sara Ajnnak in [Västerbottens-Kuriren](#).

WE ACCUSE RALLY SWEDEN for its complete arrogance and blatant disregard for agreements. Rally Sweden and Rans Sámi community had agreed to remove one stage from the competition. Yet, on Sunday, the race was still carried out on that stage.

"In this case, I chose to override the Sámi community. I understand that they are disappointed in me," said Rally Director Erik Åström to [SVT Västerbotten](#).

Well, that is certainly one way to treat a small Sámi community – with zero respect for agreements between two parties.

"When the Swedish Rally leaves, they will have a serious situation to address. They need to reflect on whether they believe this was handled well or not," says Maida Eira Andersson in the same [SVT Västerbotten report](#). She is a board member of Rans Sámi community and the reindeer herder who lost three reindeers in a hate crime, now under investigation as aggravated animal cruelty.

An [SVT Västerbotten](#) journalist interviewed Rally Sweden's CEO, Anna Nordkvist, and asked if the conflict was troubling for them. "I understand that, and we take responsibility for how we have communicated, of course," she responded, adding, "We apologize if anyone feels

they were not given the right information."

But this is NOT about the Sámi community FEELING uninformed. The FACT is, they were overridden.

WE ACCUSE UMEÅ MUNICIPALITY. Umeå is a Sámi administrative municipality, legally obligated under Sweden's Minority Act to promote Sámi culture, including traditional reindeer herding. It is impossible for Umeå's politicians and officials to be unaware that thousands of reindeer migrate to the coastal region each winter.

Yet, Umeå Municipality has signed agreements ensuring that the World Rally Championship will be hosted in Umeå through 2026 and 2027, despite the severe consequences for reindeer herding and the conflicts it fuels in local communities. There must be alternative locations where the rally does not jeopardize the essential winter grazing grounds. Every form of encroachment shrinks the available land, leaving the reindeer with less and less food.

Per-Mikael Jonsson, chairman of Rans Sámi community, told [ETC](#) that the hostility toward both the reindeer herders and their children has intensified over the past week: "People want to paint us as trying to sabotage the rally when in reality, we are just grazing our reindeer here, as we always have."

"Umeå Municipality has contributed over 14 million SEK to the rally. The sponsorship terms required agreements to be made with the affected Sámi villages. (...) The fact that the rally organizers show little regard for agreements is one thing, but it is the municipality's responsibility to ensure that the conditions for this multi-million sponsorship are actually met. If the municipality fails to demand accountability, how can we expect anyone else to?" writes Linda Westerlind, political editor at [Folkbladet](#).

Umeå's Municipal Council Chairman, Hans Lindberg (S), suggests that Rally Sweden and Rans Sámi community should "bury the hatchet." He told [P4 Västerbotten](#): "I think we may need to drink more coffee together, Rally Sweden and the Sámi community, and reach an agreement."

Coffee drinking may be nice, but we demand to know what strategies Umeå Municipality has to address the hate and threats against its own citizens and the harassment of Sámi children in schools. We also demand to know how the municipality will follow up on Rally Sweden's breach of contract and what consequences it will face.

WE ACCUSE THE VÄSTERBOTTEN COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD which is legally obligated to promote traditional reindeer husbandry. The board evaluated the rally's permit application based on traffic regulations and public order laws, but not based on the Minority Act or the Reindeer Husbandry Act, where violations of reindeer herding rights would have been a key consideration.

The board took over three months to make a decision but granted the permit only three weeks before the rally started. Rans Sámi community had much less time to review the documents and submitted an appeal within 14 days, in time – but their case was not even considered. Instead, they were blamed in the media for supposedly filing their appeal too late, fueling further hatred and threats on social media.

The Swedish Transport Agency has criticized the County Administrative Board for granting the permit so close to the event, preventing the agency from properly reviewing the thousands of pages of documents before the rally was over. But Per Lundström, Chief Legal Officer at the County Administrative Board, dismisses the criticism: "Considering how complex this case is, with its extensive documentation and investigations, one cannot say that the handling time was too long," he told [SVT Västerbotten](#).

Now, after the fact, we ask: Does the County Administrative Board believe they made the right decision?

We see anti-Sámi hatred spreading in local media comment sections. We hear Rally Director Erik Åström openly stating in [SVT Västerbotten](#) that he "chose to override the Sámi community."

DEAFENING PASSIVITY

"Where I, as a Sámi, would have wanted to see clear leadership from the majority society, there is instead a deafening passivity. No one takes a stand and draws the line between right and wrong. Instead, innocent reindeer pay the price for this inflamed situation, while Sámi communities – already struggling with extreme climate changes, harsh winters, and an increasingly uncertain future – now have yet another battle to fight, in addition to all the ongoing exploitation," writes Sara Ajnnak in [Västerbottens-Kuriren](#).

"Passivity from society equals acceptance of racism, hatred, and threats against reindeer herders and their animals. It is a direct threat to fundamental democratic values and human rights," says Jenny Wik Karlsson, legal counsel at the Swedish Sámi Association, in a [press release](#).

Five Sámi parliament parties – Guovssonásti, Sámiid Riikkabellodat, Min Geaidnu, Landspartiet Svenska Samerand and Vuovdega – are now calling on the government, relevant authorities and actors to respect constitutionally protected Sámi rights at events such as the Swedish Rally.

Amnesty Sápmi certainly has expectations that a commercial actor such as Rally Sweden will show respect for animals and indigenous peoples. However, it is the County Administrative Board of Västerbotten and Umeå Municipality that have statutory obligations towards the indigenous Sámi people. They are obliged to promote in their activities the Sámi's ability to maintain and develop their culture in accordance with the Minority Act (paragraph 4) and to

give the Sámi the opportunity to have an influence on issues that affect them (paragraph 5). Authorities must take the Sami's views and needs into account in their decision-making and strive to make decisions that the Sami can support. However, knowledge of the meaning of the Swedish Minority Act seems to be poor.

The County Administrative Board in Västerbotten and Umeå Municipality have a solid homework to do and Rally Sweden should review its values.

Amnesty Sápmi

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