Note

The following is a sample e-mail to be sent to relevant authorities in Finland. Some relevant e-mail addresses are listed below. You may also send it to the Finnish Ambassador of your country. You can send the text as a Word document attached to your message, or copied into the body of an e-mail. If you wish, you may add a personal note introducing yourself and your interest in the case. Please sign with your name and provide your personal contact details for authenticity.

Addresses

City Manager of Oulu, Matti Pennanen, matti.pennanen@ouka.fi

Head of Social Welfare in the City of Oulu, Arja Heikkinen, arja.heikkinen@ouka.fi

Finnish Prime Minister, Juha Sipilä, juha.sipila@eduskunta.fi

The Parliamentary Ombudsman of Finland, Petri Jääskeläinen, ombudsman@parliament.fi

Date

Dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

Re Breach of immigrant parent’s and children’s human rights in Finnish child protection case

I write to express my deep concern regarding the circumstances surrounding a child protection case initiated by the Social Services of the City of Oulu, Finland, in 2011 as presented in the documentary at www.lokakuunliike.com/ester. The case involves an African mother and her two daughters. The children were taken into care at the ages of 5 months and 5 years, respectively, while the mother was living at a reception centre for asylum-seekers in Oulu, following suspicions of mistreatment. After an emergency placement, the municipal Police began to investigate the allegations that led to the decision by the Social Services to take the oldest child into care. By 2013, the mother was cleared of any suspicions by the Police, although not informed about the outcome. Despite this outcome, the child in concern remains in a family placement of indeterminate length and is only allowed to meet with her mother 3 hours per month, supervised by a Finnish guardian.

Subsequently, the second child, at the time a breast-feeding infant, was also placed in care. This decision was based on the immediate emotional and physical reaction of the mother to the news of her oldest daughter being placed into care, as communicated by two social workers. The social workers who initiated the care order have in their formal statements provided conflicting accounts of the mother’s reactions which formed the basis of the decision. Allegations that the mother suffered from sustained emotional difficulties, including aggression, were not subsequently supported by mental health professionals. The decision has regardless been upheld in local and administrative courts.

When children are taken into care, every effort should be taken to ensure that their cultural and linguistic heritage are protected and nurtured, and the bond with the parents should be maintained so that the children may be returned to their family as soon as possible. In the current case, the opposite has happened. Two young African English-speaking children were abruptly placed with a white family who speak no English and are not familiar with the children’s cultural background. This undermines the aim of reunification articulated in Finnish child protection law as well as international human rights law. The fundamental right to family life and privacy is enshrined in article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, to which Finland is a party.

Even though the mother has co-operated at all points with the authorities and received a residence permit in 2012, visits with her children have been limited and very little effort has been made to enable these children to develop a good relationship with their mother. For example, the children have never been allowed to visit their mother's home. It would seem that there was never any intention of returning them to their mother and that actions have been taken to prevent that from ever being an option.

I understand that Finland has ratified the ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child’ and yet the current case appears to have violated articles 8, 9, 20, 21, 25, 30 and 39. It shocks and saddens me to hear that children’s rights have been broken in this way in Finland, a member state of the European Union. I had always envisaged Finland as a country that protects its people and I would have expected such a case to have had a more positive outcome for her and her children. I am sure that you will also share my deep concern for this matter. I request that you pass on my concern to the appropriate authorities in the national government and in Oulu in order that steps can be taken to reunite the mother and her children at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,