

## **Opening address by Mr Juha Sipilä at the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event of Finn Church Aid**

Honourable Archbishop Mäkinen,  
Mr Adama Dieng (Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide)  
Madam Albright(CEO of the Global Partnership for Education)

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to join you here today at the seventieth Anniversary Event of Finn Church Aid.

This year, Finland is celebrating one hundred years of independence. During these years, we have witnessed progress and growth but also conflicts and poverty. Seventy years ago, Finland had just lived through two wars. Our country was an agrarian society and heavily in debt. We were what is nowadays known as a post-conflict, fragile state. We needed help.

During its first years of operation, Finn Church Aid took part in the reconstruction of war-torn Finland. The story of Finn Church Aid is in many ways symbolic of the story of Finland. The organization has evolved in tandem with our country, through hard times to what it is today.

Nowadays, Finland is a stable welfare society. We received help when we needed it, and now it is our turn to help others. Finn Church Aid has developed into the largest development cooperation civil society organization in Finland and the second largest provider of humanitarian assistance. You are also a front runner in peace mediation. The work of your organization has been priceless both for our country and for the whole world.

Looking at Finland's path from a fragile state to what we are today, it is clear that some of the choices made in the past were instrumental to our success. We chose to work for gender equality and everyone's right to high-quality education. We also chose to make sure that everyone is provided the opportunity to put their potential into use, despite of their financial situation. Finland has gained plenty of international recognition in these areas. And Finn Church Aid has put this knowledge into use in its own work in clever and innovative ways.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Finn Church Aid has not chosen the easiest path. The slogan of this celebration is “Courage”, which describes your principles well.

As Prime Minister, I have learned to see when someone is truly committed to resolving issues instead of just telling others what to do. Finn Church Aid has chosen this brave path for resolving difficult problems. It is highly commendable that, despite the risks, you have chosen to work in the most fragile of countries.

The fact is that the future of fragile countries may end up impacting the stability of our own society. When states fail, conflict and human rights violations often follow. Any area that is left unstable may come to haunt us for example in the form of refugee or migrant crises.

Finn Church Aid is one of the world’s leading agencies in the work with the most fragile countries. This has also been recognized by the United Nations, making us Finns very proud. I’m sure that the path has not always been easy. But you have succeeded in developing new mechanisms, such as the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. You have also achieved significant results in crisis areas such as Eritrea and Somalia.

Finn Church Aid is an important and longstanding cooperation partner for both the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Government of Finland. I would like to thank you for all your advice to our officials and even our ministers. You have shared your insightful and practical experiences in preventing extremism, in integrating people into society and in peace mediation. I have also benefited personally from the help of Mr Antti Pentikäinen, in thinking how to respond to the migration crisis and to resolve its root causes.

I urge you all to push forward. As Prime Minister of Finland, all too often I find that peace mediation remains a mere slogan instead of being translated into action. We are living in difficult and complex times. Responding to the challenges of our time is not easy – but with the help of organizations such as yours, hope is strong.

Your slogan states that you act for human dignity. I share the same values. I believe that we are all images of God. Witnessing all the atrocities committed in the name of religion, causes me pain. This is why I also want to give recognition to the work of the UN Office for the Prevention of Genocide, and you, Under-Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Dieng. I am very happy that you have learned to trust and work with the same organization as we have.

Distinguished guests,

Today we are here to celebrate Finn Church Aid – not only for the organization's seventieth birthday but also for the quality and impact of its work.

A recent independent evaluation report concluded that Finn Church Aid's work is innovative, relevant and cost effective. The report also said that Finn Church Aid works with a holistic approach, with a focus on the most vulnerable communities, and with courage to open-mindedly try out new methods and partnerships.

It is an honour for me to call Finn Church Aid our partner.

I want to warmly congratulate Finn Church Aid and wish your organization all the best of success and courage in the future.

Thank you.