

**Speech by Ms. Jutta Urpilainen  
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*Translation*

Today's scripture speaks first of tearing and injuring. The reality of suffering is seen daily in news footage, and in the face of every human being suffering in one way or another.

Then the scripture speaks of healing, reviving, the dawn and spring rains that we receive from heaven. The view of reconciliation and unity opens out of a faith in which we are all one. Slave or free. Male or female. These visions of hope are something each one of us may search for and promote in our own time.

As the Foreign Minister's Special Representative on Mediation, I have had the opportunity to become acquainted with the situation in fragile states in Africa. I have heard stories of suffering, and still many more stories of hope. This makes me think of the women leaders I met in Addis Ababa, in the capital of the African Union. These women work together to build a continent of peace from their much-suffering part of the world. It also reminds me of workers in a refugee camp in Ethiopia, on the border of South Sudan, who considered children fleeing the war as builders of a brighter future.

Today, I would like to remind us of Burundi, which faced one of the most brutal civil wars ever in the 1990s. The "tearing and injuring" between the Hutu and Tutsi people grew into such powerful images of enmity that human relationships over the tribal barriers were almost impossible.

However, we Finns heard a different kind of testimony at the Lappeenranta Church Assembly in 1997. There student pastor, Emmanuel Ndikumana, told us that the Hutus and Tutsis had found a common forum for "healing and reviving" in the student movement at the University of Bujumbura. In those gatherings, participants were able to look forward to unity instead of tension between the tribes and to the future instead of past crimes.

In this cathedral, near the main building of the University of Helsinki, it is appropriate to state that educational institutions and churches can, at their best, serve as places seeking to unify and look to the future. This ceremony celebrating a prayer day of peace, human rights and international responsibility is a good example of that.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is good to take a wide view. It is important to look at all humanity and help where the greatest distress is. It is also good to take a closer view. It is important to look at the "tearing and injuring" of our own nation and to examine the "healing and reviving" of our people. The President of the Republic, Sauli Niinistö, also presented this challenge to us in his declaration at the latest prayer day ceremony, drawing our attention to the 1918 Civil War Memorial Year.

During the last hundred years, we have risen from a poor nation, shattered by war, to a successful national economy, to a Nordic welfare state, to the least fragile state and - according to recent research- to the happiest nation in the world.

The journey has not been easy. Finland of the 1920s was Burundi of the 2000s. The tragedy of the Civil War continued in our everyday encounters, in sore and bitter memories, in feelings of shame, sorrow and anger as well as in prejudices, presumptions and various stories containing the traces of enemy images.

As a nation, we have made many mistakes and committed plenty of excesses. However, Finland has also done something right. The unifying policy adopted after the civil war involved implementing equal education. Primary schools became meeting forums for all people. The Finnish educational system has become a success story that enables upward social mobility. Another meeting forum, an open municipal democracy, created hope for the lost to also make their voice heard.

Since we live globally in a world of civil wars, the story of Finland is of great interest. Thus we Finns are able to share our own story with our fellow men living with the reality of "tearing and injuring". The story of "healing and reviving" is achievable. "Dawn" and "spring rains" are possible.

Our story from poverty to prosperity, from civil war to a unified nation is intriguing. Our means - participatory democracy and equal education - have proved to be powerful. Nevertheless, I have to ask, what has been the core of that path of reconciliation? What was needed for Reds and Whites to be able to share a common home, defend it and rebuild it together?

In the search for this core, our former Archbishop presented one of the answers in this Cathedral when he preached to the Parliament most recently at the Independence Day celebration service. Kari Mäkinen challenged us to examine the quote " I view everything and everyone, eye to eye" from the novel trilogy "Under the North Star".

In my opinion, this quote captures something very essential about the ethos of Finnish democracy and the welfare state. Seeing others from our own eye level makes us listen to what our fellow citizen wants to say - and trust in our own thinking and say it aloud. To view others from our own eye level makes us see the unique value in each one of us - and respect ourselves and use our gifts in everyday life, at work and in society.

For me, unity means that each one of us is seen. That our identity is seen and recognised. Today, a common unity has to contain heterosexual couples and rainbow families, both native people and immigrants, as well as those who share our religion or profess a different faith.

To see different identities is a timely political challenge. In the face of globalisation, many people feel that their identity is threatened. American writer Francis Fukuyama wrote in his book "Identity : The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment" about the need to have social recognition for our different identities. He sees it as a prerequisite for liberal democracy to survive the wave of populism.

According to Fukuyama, we cannot eliminate our souls' desire to belong to a group and be recognised (thymos). Nevertheless, identity politics can be guided. Instead of a narrow national identity, we can promote a citizenship identity that does not exclude any ethnicity or religion, but challenges everyone to integrate into the values of equality and civic responsibility.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us return to the second scripture of the day that speaks of the unity of God's children which included even the juxtapositions of the time. Slave and free. Male and female. To believe in this unity reflects a radical idea of equality, which has its own social implications.

Over a hundred years ago, the theology of redemption challenged Finns to ask how could the equality of all citizens be realised in a class society ruled by "free men". "Slaves of work" and "women restricted to narrow roles" wanted to be seen and began to demand universal suffrage. Democracy and the rule of law have been tools to strengthen peace and human rights within societies.

A century later, we may ask how our national democracy and a society based on law can guarantee peace and human rights in an increasingly interdependent world. Globalisation. Artificial intelligence. Climate change. Migration. International terrorism. These examples show that national laws are not, and will not be, sufficient to ensure respect for peace and human rights in the future.

This leads us to the third theme of this prayer day, international responsibility. The crucial question we have to address is - how do we succeed in restoring confidence in multilateral cooperation and are we ready to strengthen international law? The current trend seems to taking us in the opposite direction. The United Nations should not become a forum where each member declares its own positions. Instead, nations have to find the desire to listen and to seek a common will and develop their ability to compromise.

Europe has to prevail in its belief that we do not wish to return to power politics with "tearing and injuring", but we choose the way of unification with "healing and reviving". The example of the European Union - with all its shortcomings - also offers a source of inspiration for others. High Representative of the European Union, Federica Mogherini, who recently visited Finland, has welcomed the cooperation between the Balkan countries over the past 20 years. She hopes that the same kind of development could be established between the Persian Gulf countries.

In the name of peace and human rights, we may share these wishes for international cooperation. Today, each of us can light a prayer candle for the dreams of peace and the circles of hope.