



60 years of Finnish Peace Mediation

Creating Security and Confidence in Cyprus

5.3.2024

Opening speech by Ambassador Harri Mäki-Reinikka

Excellencies, colleagues, UN-peacekeepers, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased and honored to see so many of you here today. Yesterday we marked the 60 years of the establishment of UNFICYP. Finland has contributed to the peacekeeping operation in Cyprus since 1964, when the Finnish contingent was one of the first to join the UNFICYP mission in April 1964 with 1007 soldiers.

By the late 1977 the majority of FINCON troops were repatriated back to Finland, ending the active patrol duties in the mission. After that the Finnish contingent was small, around 10 individuals consisting mostly of staff officials. In 2005 the Finnish flag was lowered marking the withdrawal of last Finnish military officer. More than 10 thousand Finnish peacekeepers served on the island during those years.

The Finnish flag was raised once again at the UN compound in spring 2021, when the first five Finnish police officers started their service at the UNFICYP. The police component of the UNFICYP is currently lead by a Finn, Satu Koivu, Assistant Police Commissioner, Senior Police Advisor. I am proud that Satu is here at Chateau Status today with some new UN-police officers from Finland among you all.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sixty years ago, the former Finnish Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Sakari Severi Tuomioja was nominated by the Secretary General of the United Nations U Thant as a mediator in the Cyprus crisis: “who shall use his best endeavours of promoting a peaceful solution and an agreed settlement of the problem confronting Cyprus in accordance with the UN Charter having in mind the well-being of the people of Cyprus”.



I am very pleased and honored that the son of late Sakari Tuomioja, Erkki Tuomioja is here telling us more about his father's role and contribution as the first mediator and Special Representative to Cyprus. I am sure that we all are very interested to hear also Erkki Tuomioja's views on peace mediation in general as he has been the longest serving Minister for Foreign Affairs in Finland's history.

Sakari Tuomioja's task as a mediator in Cyprus can be considered as a stepping stone in the Finnish peace mediation history. After Tuomioja, many other Finns have been called to act as mediators in many disputes and conflicts, including late Martti Ahtisaari, former president of Finland and Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 2008, who played a prominent role in resolving serious and long-lasting conflicts, including ones in Namibia, Aceh and Kosovo. Former Prime Minister of Finland, late Harri Holkeri played an important role in securing the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland and later served as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Kosovo, and Elisabeth Rehn, former Minister of Defence, who served as the Special Representative and Coordinator of United Nations Operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The names just mentioned are prominent ones and I am sure that the list will become much longer in the future as the two candidates at the second round of the presidential elections in Finland a month ago, Alexander Stubb and Pekka Haavisto, both underlined the importance of Finland continuing to play an active role in international peace mediation efforts.

As the winner of the elections and Finland's new President Alexander Stubb took office just four days ago, on 1.3., it is worth of mentioning that after the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 he had a role to play on the ceasefire between Russia and Georgia as a Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the OSCE. Afterwards he served as Chair of the Board of the Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation (Crisis Management Initiative, CMI) since January 2018 until last month. During his tenure, CMI has almost doubled its activities – and one of the CMI events (on Georgia) was organized here in Cyprus year ago.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the title of this seminar is 60 years of Finnish Peace Mediation – Creating Security and Confidence in Cyprus, I am pleased to refer to the work done by the Embassy. It was already eight years ago when the idea to enhance the startup ecosystem in Cyprus came to life in the form of Startups4Peace program. Since the beginning, the Embassy of Finland supported this program that promote peace and reconciliation between the two communities on the island.



The program is co-funded by the European Commission and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. The program runs with the support of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce making it one of the few bicommunal programmes in Cyprus today.

I am also happy to note that Finland has co-funded the Cyprus Futures scenarios, what together with Netherlands and Norway (via PRIO). The scenarios were developed by a diverse group of 36 Cypriots, who dedicated over 15 days of their time to this project on a voluntary basis. There are informative leaflets and brochures of these two projects on the tables.

Distinguished participants,

This is a moment to remember and pay tribute to all peacekeepers. I would like mention two remarkable Finns, who brought here key specialist skills, particularly in the Headquarters functions. As some of you know, Finland has provided UNFICYP with two Force Commanders – Lt General Armas Eino Martola (1966-69) and Brig General Ahti Vartiainen (1994-97).

It is also important to remember General Ensio Siilasvuo, who is the best known of Finland's many peacekeepers. He spent 15 years in a range of important peacekeeping duties, mostly in the Middle East from 1967 until 1979, but before that he served in Cyprus as Commander of the Finnish Cyprus battalion in 1964-65.

We remember also those Finnish soldiers, who lost their lives on operational services and those who were wounded during the events, mostly during the war in 1974. The Finnish peacekeepers selfless commitment lead to many success stories on the ground but some of them paid the ultimate price.

One of the speakers here today is the former State Secretary Pertti Torstila, a former peacekeeper, who as the Battalion Platoon Commander at UNFICYP in 1966-67 had to mediate many disputes at the grass root level. Later on in the diplomatic service, he contributed to the Finnish Presidencies of the European Union in 1999 and 2006, when the issues related to Cyprus and Turkey were some of the most significant challenges.

I welcome warmly the other speakers here today, Minister Plenipotentiary, Ms Penelope Erotokritou, Head of the UNFICYP and Deputy Special Adviser Colin Stewart and and Mr Ödzil and Andreas D. Mavroyiannis, who served as Chief Negotiators during the previous round of negotiations, who will share their insights and views of the current situation and way forward.



I warmly welcome reflections and active discussion after. Let's talk about Cyprus! But before that we can go back to the times 60 years ago through the following short video clip.

Thank you!