



Greeting from President of the Republic Sauli Niinistö to Finnish expatriates in Finland's centenary year

Dear Finnish expatriates and people of Finnish heritage around the world. There are many of you!

There were hundreds of thousands of you even before our independence, now there are up to two million people of Finnish heritage living around the world. If even one in ten of you light a candle on your window sill on Independence Day, there will be a sea of light.

I remember the pupils of the Finnish school in Switzerland waving small Finnish flags, war veterans in Sweden, ice hockey stars in Canada and most recently the strong spirit of unity at the Finnish-American FinnFest celebration in Minnesota.

Throughout my term as president, I have had the opportunity to meet with you; people of Finnish heritage and Finns all around the world. Some have moved from Finland recently, while many others have a bond with Finland only through their grandparents. One of the speakers at the FinnFest opening told of her first visit to Finland. "I felt as if I had come home," she said. This made me think about Finnish identity as a feeling and how strong that feeling is.

During its independence, Finland has developed from a poor people into a successful nation. At times, our economic situation has prompted people to move elsewhere. It is fortunate that there has been a place for competent and hard-working Finns in other countries at those times.

Even now, other countries seek expertise from our 100-year-old country. And I know that many of you have sought a life abroad because of the most potent emotion of all, love.

The history of migration is also a part of Finland's story and the process of building Finland. Finnish expatriates have created the Finnish brand. You will be the first and perhaps the only connection to Finland many people will ever have.

I am pleased with what you reflect. You represent courage, curiosity and openness. You have the *sisu*, the guts, to persevere in a foreign culture and the heart to keep Finland close.

I have spoken about participatory patriotism. It is a feeling that has been achieved with democracy, equality and justice. We Finns feel that this is a country and society that everyone participates in. Everyone, both near and far, must protect this feeling of cohesion together.

Together is also the theme of Finland's Centennial. This concept reaches every place where there are Finns. Together we form Finland, together we will make this country move forward.

I wish you all a very happy Centennial year!