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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND

URHO KEKKONEN
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FINLAND

THE SOUTH LAWN

10:40 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: President Kekkonen, ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of the American people, I am delighted to welcome you to our country. Your visit permits us to reaffirm the closeness of the ties between our two countries and to reciprocate the wonderful hospitality extended to Mrs. Ford and me in Helsinki just a year ago.

Finns began arriving in America over 300 years ago and have contributed much to the building of the United States. My home State, Michigan, which is said to resemble Finland in many respects, has attracted many Finns. Their cultural influence, the deep Finnish devotion to education, commerce, farming and physical fitness is evident in Michigan's copper country.

Mr. President, Finland has proven beyond any doubt whatsoever in recent years that a small country can make important contributions to world peace and world understanding of fundamental importance to both of our nations.

Your active involvement in world affairs; your role in the United Nations, including a significant part in peacekeeping forces in the Middle East and in Cyprus; your serving as a host to important international conferences such as the initial phase of the strategic arms negotiations and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, have all contributed to a better world.

Finland has played a constructive role within the Nordic Council and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and has followed closely the dialogue which has been established between the developed and developing countries.

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Humanity respects and values Finland's efforts to help bring differences among nations and overcome obstacles to international peace and stability.

Mr. President, you honor us by this Bicentennial visit. Your personal participation in celebrations organized by Finnish-Americans contributes to the wonderful mood the Bicentennial has generated. As a people, we are deeply grateful for Finland's participation.

The establishment at the University of Helsinki of a Bicentennial Chair of American Studies, the American Days Program in Finland in June, and Bicentennial programs in more than a dozen Finnish cities, are vivid reminders of our friendship and kinship.

Mr. President, the nations of the world now face many, many challenges. Their solution requires our best common efforts in the counsel and understanding of nations working together. With a positive spirit, with understanding and with full dedication, we will prevail.

I look forward to our discussions, Mr. President, today, and future good relations between Finland and the United States. Americans, one and all, bid you welcome and wish you an enjoyable and productive visit.

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PRESIDENT KEKKONEN: Mr. President, I thank you for your very kind words of welcome. Indeed, it gives me great pleasure to have this opportunity to pay a visit to your country.

I am particularly delighted that this occasion coincides with the Bicentennial celebration of the independence of the United States. We, in Finland, realize very well the enormous responsibility which the United States as a great power bears in solving international problems.

Mr. President, your active conduct of foreign policy and your efforts to solve these problems in an equitable manner dependably and honestly are respected all over the world. Your visit in Finland, Mr. President, last summer in connection with the Helsinki summit provided me with the personal occasion for talks that I hope will be both found informative and constructive. Then we had the privilege of acting as host for the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and memories of those days are still present in the hearts of the Finnish people.

In a sense, my present visit has a twofold purpose: Firstly, I wish to transmit the greetings of the people of Finland to the people of the United States in their Bicentennial year. This is a most welcome task for me. The good political relations between our countries have traditionally been complemented by ties of friendship and common heritage between our peoples.

Secondly, I am looking forward to the opportunity of exchanging views on topics of mutual interest, particularly on the problems related to the relaxation of international tension.

As you know, Mr. President, it is our policy to give high priority to this development. I am very much looking forward to the discussions and meetings that I am going to have with you, Mr. President, and with other leaders of your country.

Thank you for the invitation, and let me once more express my joy for this opportunity of visiting the United States.

Thank you.

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(AT 10:46 A.M. EDT)