

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUGUST 3, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
ANDDR. URHO KEKKONEN
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FINLAND

THE STATE FLOOR

10:40 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. President, distinguished guests.

Mrs. Ford and I are greatly honored to have all of you as our guests on this auspicious occasion.

Mr. President, this summer the United States, as we have both mentioned this morning, celebrates its 200th anniversary. By joining with us on this occasion, we are honored by the fact that you have participated in this occasion today. Your participation in Finnish-American Bicentennial ceremonies at Suomi College, founded by Finnish immigrants in my State of Michigan, is a vivid reminder of Finland's great contribution to America's background and America's presence, and America's future.

To cite a single example, Americans from coast to coast know of Finnish genius in Saarinen's design of Washington's Dulles Airport, one of the outstanding architectural achievements in our country in recent years. But whether in steel or concrete, or in mind or in spirit, the Finnish involvement with the United States continues to affirm the traditional ties of friendship between our two peoples.

Mr. President, during this Bicentennial year, Americans are essentially gratified by Finland's observance of our anniversary. The wonderful Tapiola Children's Choir has already performed here and Finnish musicians are now entertaining at the Smithsonian festival. The Sibelius Academy Choir, I am told, will visit the United States this fall, thanks to the generosity of the Finnish Government.

For these and all of Finland's contributions to our Bicentennial, Americans are deeply appreciative.

This summer, both our countries participated in the Olympic games, and I was talking to you earlier about your outstanding gold medal winner who won the five-thousand meter and finished fifth in the marathon. But I think it is appropriate on this occasion, Mr. President, to note that you had the high honor, yourself, of being an Olympian. You made your first trip to the United States as head of the Finnish team to the Olympic games in Los Angeles in 1932, and I am pleased to note that Finland continued to win, not only gold medals in those track contests that I mentioned, but elsewhere.

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May I congratulate your country and your champions on this occasion.

Mr. President, as a fellow skier (laughter), I can only marvel at more than the 600 miles you ski cross-country and downhill each year. I must confess, mine is downhill. (Laughter) But your prowess as a jogger, fisherman and hunter is legendary. At one time, we all know who follow sports that you were the high-jump champion of your country and represented Finland in the Olympics in that contest.

I think it indicates very clearly that you are the embodiment of Finland's worldwide reputation for physical fitness.

To change the subject, Mr. President, it was just a year ago last week that Mrs. Ford and I visited Helsinki on the occasion of the conference on security and cooperation in Europe. As host of that conference, Finland, again, showed all of the world its deep interest and active role in promoting international understanding and amity in working for peace and for stability.

We in the United States value Finland's creative participation in world affairs under your wise and skillful leadership. We welcome Finland's contributions to the United States peace-keeping efforts in Cyprus, as well as in the Middle East.

Our strong ties between us, bilaterally are based on many shared ideals and genuine mutual respect. Above all, in this country Finland is respected as a nation that meets its obligations.

Just a few weeks ago, Finland wrote a new page in international relations by paying off in full its World War I debt to the United States, eight years ahead of schedule. I know that you share my satisfaction in the knowledge that this last payment will be used to send young people from Finland and the United States on exchange visits for generations to come.

Ladies and gentlemen, I propose a toast to a distinguished world statesman, the President of the Republic of Finland and to the continued close and friendly relations between the governments and the peoples of the United States and Finland.

Mr. President.

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PRESIDENT KEKKONEN: Mr. President, Mrs. Ford, ladies and gentlemen:

I wish to express my sincere thanks to you, Mr. President, for the warm welcome this morning and for the words of friendship you have just spoken. You know as well as I do that the friendship and mutual understanding existing between our two countries is highly valued and cherished among the Finnish people.

We are deeply honored and gratified in receiving your invitation to pay an official State visit to the United States this year. The American Bicentennial has gained much public attention also in Finland. We, in Finland, take certain pride in the fact that among the Founding Fathers there was the early Finnish settler John Morton, originally Jussi Marttinen, who, of course, cast his vote in favor of the Declaration of Independence.

Therefore, we have every reason to make this commemoration of the American Revolution our own and remember those early Finnish settlers who disembarked from 1638 to 1654 on both shores of the Delaware River, established their settlements and later on were one of the nationalities that helped to settle the original 13 States of the Union.

We do not know much about the hopes and the failings of the very first Finns coming to America but the Finnish settlers of later days seemed to have been happy and hopeful when they left the shores of Europe.

If we give credence to Finnish immigrant ballads reading as follows: "I am going to America. Everyone is on his way. The American shores are sanded with gold, they say." Although they did not find golden sand, I know they were not disappointed when they disembarked on the shores of the new country.

My motivation for looking forward with great expectations to this visit was different. It reminded me of my two or three previous visits to this great country. They were both very valuable and important from the Finnish point of view.

In July 1970, the possibility of convening a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe was one of the main topics of our discussion here in Washington. During those discussions I said that I was speaking for a European nation that desires nothing but the possibility of living in peace and security and cultivating friendly relations with all nations, both near and far. And I expressed the hope that these aspirations of the Finnish people would need understanding and sympathy on the part of the United States.

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Today we know what then has happened -- the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe has taken place and when the Final Act of that Conference was signed in Helsinki on August 1, 1975, you, Mr. President, represented in person the United States of America.

In my statement at the Helsinki Conference I said that the security of states, cooperation among peoples, and the enrichment of the lives of human persons are watchwords of the Conference.

Now that a year has passed since that Conference, I believe that we can note that our expectations have not been unfounded. The implementation of the recommendations, continuity of the Conference has begun, but it will continue for a long time in the future.

Mr. President, in your speech in Helsinki a year ago, you quite correctly stated that history will judge this Conference not by what we say today, but what we do tomorrow; not by the promises we make, but by the promises we keep.

Indeed, our adherence to promises, our acts and their results have been and will be the crucial test of the rationale and the benefit of the process of the Conference on European Security and Cooperation in its various stages.

At the same time, we must pay attention to the continuity of this process through the conference to be held in Belgrade next year and the development flowing from the conference. On her part, Finland will do her utmost that the development that commenced and procedures established will not go to waste.

Equality and mutual responsibility have always characterized the interactions between Finland and the United States. Again, it has characterized the meetings during my present visit and made our discussions useful.

I hope this Bicentennial State visit will further strengthen the warm ties of friendship which have always characterized the relations between our two countries. On behalf of the people of Finland and on my own, I would like to express our warmest wishes to you, Mr. President and Mrs. Ford, and to all the people of the United States who are now commemorating their two centuries of work for the happiness and greatness of the United States of America.

Mr. President, I am very happy that I have had the opportunity to exchange views with you today on several international questions. The common feature in the talks of today and in those which we had last year has been their friendly, sincere and constructive spirit which I appreciate very much.

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Mr. President, your activity in high political positions in your country has been exceptionally long and impressive. Throughout your whole public career you have been known as a resolute man who has never hesitated to take responsibility and who has been capable of making decisions even in situations that have called for rapid action.

Your activities in the highest office of your country, which has rightly been characterized as one of the most difficult and responsible in the world, has also abroad created of you an image of a dependable and realistic statesman.

I am most grateful to you, Mr. President and Mrs. Ford, for your generous hospitality and for this festive opportunity to meet so many distinguished Americans.

Ladies and gentlemen, may I ask you to join me in a toast in honor of the President of the United States and Mrs. Ford.

END (AT 10:57 P.M. EDT)