

Dear kinsfolk and friends.

First, I would like to invite you to make a conceptual trip from Lahti across the Gulf of Finland to the southeast corner of Estonia, where the village of Obinitsa with fewer than 150 people, is located directly next to the Russian border. Yet, last year, this old seto village was the cultural capital of millions of Finno-Ugric peoples. This shows how something small can actually be something great.

The dedication and tenacity of the approximately 10,000 Setos, who mostly live in Estonia, could be a compass for us all, showing us how to make sure that a special culture survives difficult times and inevitably changes. In addition to their own will, they also have the support and understanding of the Estonian state.

Moving south somewhat we see how, with the help of kindred peoples and the Latvian state, the culture of the Livs is making a comeback, from the edge of extinction, and becoming revitalized.

Based on my family's experience, I am personally well acquainted with how to preserve the culture and language of one's people even forced to live far from one's homeland. My family fled to the West to escape the Soviet occupation and together with other exile Estonians preserved our culture, and what's most important, kept it alive. Of course, I recognize that in occupied Estonia all this occurred even more vigorously, with Estonians preserving and developing their language and culture, it despite all the foreign pressure and headwinds.

What we must talk about here is the survival and development of the Finno-Ugric world. This involves much more than just recording and preserving folk culture. It involves those who are larger providing support, assistance and confidence in order to help those who are smaller become great.

In today's global village, or the worldwide information society, as a reaction to openness and globalization, locality – a much smaller communal identity than the state and an independent collective self-determination – is becoming stronger everywhere.

In this, we can see the strength of the free world. Free and democratic societies support projects essential for the preservation of diverse cultures; they support diversity to ensure that the languages and cultures of the smallest nations survive.

Here at the World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples, let's be honest with ourselves at this. Honest about our concerns related to the decline in the populations of the Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia and the number of speakers of Finno-Ugric languages. This is our common concern that is related to our own identity; an identity that would be much poorer without the Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia. Imagine the voids that would be left with if we excised Lennart Meri's films, Veljo Tormis's music or Kaljo Põllu's graphic art from our culture. They all are based on the cultural heritage of the Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia.

Therefore, these peoples help us to we support ourselves, our own linguistic and cultural space. We support the cultural richness and diversity of the entire world.

The small and unique Finno-Ugric and Samoyed peoples need to be protected and supported by those who are larger. Only a few dozen people speak the language of the Votes and Eenets; about a hundred speak the language of the Izorhi and the Nganasan. They are the only ones and the last ones. They are our common wealth and it requires very special attention. We are used to protecting animals and plants, recording them in Red Books, using both legal and radical methods to defend them. But the disappearance of languages, against the background of developing raw-material-based economies and conflicts between the fragments of unique peoples and large industrial enterprises are seen as a natural process.

The snow of the Siberian oil fields red with the suffering of the indigenous peoples, which was already worrying 30 years ago, must not be seen as an acceptable norm in the 21st century. And we must silently reconcile ourselves to this. Someone's financial profit must not outweigh the loss of languages and cultures, because this destroys something in all of us. We, along with the rest of humankind, become poorer.

The Forum of Indigenous Peoples, and an Estonian as its member, is making a global contribution to make sure this does not happen; because the Finno-Ugric peoples who have their own states are obligated to support our smaller kindred peoples. Thus, I am very pleased about the initiative for a Forum of Finno-Ugric Villages, which will provide support to our kindred

peoples and promote our cooperation.

I am pleased to forward an idea from Tarmo Soomere, the President of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, which could help Finno-Ugric linguists that write in Russian to make the results of their research work available to the global academic community, by translating them into English and publishing them in the journal *Linguistica Uralica*. However this also assumes cooperation between our countries.

Looking at the Finno-Ugric world, we must see increased cooperation, because only together will be able to achieve anything; hopelessness must never be our ally, we must always transcend it.

Dear listeners,

Let's think about the fate of the Estonians and Finns. Preparations are actively underway for celebrating the first great jubilee – the 100th anniversary – in two Finno-Ugric nation-states. In this Finno-Ugric universe, this fact definitely deserves to be remembered and elucidated.

Our experience speaks of friends and how important they are, especially when they are in trouble.

When Estonia was occupied, we naturally lost our foreign embassies. It's true that there were principled emissaries that continued to represent the people who had lost their freedom and they continued to be recognized as Estonia's representatives. However we needed a different type of foreign representation in the many states and cities of the free world throughout the occupation decades of the latter part of the 20th century. The societies, associations and country-less institutions of the Estonian refugees upheld the legal continuity of the state and created support for the continuation of the "non-recognition policy".

However, there were not enough Estonians to go around and, for instance, here in Finland there was no Estonian exile community. However, this did not mean that an embassy was not established. If you can't do something yourself, your friends will help. I believe that it was here

in Finland in the 1980s that one of the brightest chapters in Estonian diplomacy related to the official restoration of Estonian independence was written, when our kindred brothers the Finns volunteered to act as unofficial diplomats. During the moments of crises as the Soviet Union was collapsing, the Tuglas Society, which had started as an Estonian cultural representation, became ever more clearly an Estonian political representation. This culminated on the hot days of August 1991 when Foreign Minister Lennart Meri set up his global headquarters at the Tuglas Society.

Dear participants in the World Congress!

A little more than a hundred days are left before the 107-year-old Estonian National Museum opens the doors to its splendid new home in Tartu – its first true home. The steadfast traditions of the Estonian National Museum have also included collecting, researching and promoting the cultures of our linguistic kin. This will now be done at a totally new level – the permanent exhibition devoted to the Finno-Ugric peoples will spread across 1,100 square meters, a space not significantly smaller than the Estonian embassy building in Helsinki.

This exhibition is an anchor, around which the life of the Finno-Ugric peoples can live and bubble. An embassy for all the small Finno-Ugric peoples is being born in Tartu.

Indigenous peoples need no longer be afraid to preserve their culture and history. Quite the opposite, this unique singularity should be their pride and provide them dignity. It is the common wealth of us all.

Dear kindred brothers, let's understand that, in the long term, the backbone for the sustainable development of every Finno-Ugric people is a good and supportive network of friends throughout the world.

Let's preserve and establish that network. So that our small but tenacious linguistic tree will continue to be verdant forever.

Thank you!