

MESSAGE FROM THE RECTOR OF HELSINKI UNIVERSITY – 38TH WCC Award Ceremony, 3 Nov. 2023

Distinguished guests, it is a great honour to welcome you all to the 38th World Cultural Council Award Ceremony at the University of Helsinki.

Throughout its history, the university has been an integral part of the birth of the Finnish national identity and the welfare state since 1640. During the years, our academic community has grown into 40,000 people scattered into 11 faculties on four campuses. We have been the alma mater of nine presidents and thousands of influential figures in the world of politics, scholarship, culture, and the business sector, not forgetting our four Nobel laureates.

Finland's capital city Helsinki is a vibrant city with a unique blend of modernity and tradition. Today we take the opportunity to celebrate in a place which lies at the heart of Finnish culture. The main building of the university is part of Senate Square, one of Finland's most renowned attractions in an iconic urban landscape. On the one side, we have Helsinki's Cathedral while, on the other side, opposite our main building, is the Government Palace housing the Prime Minister's office.

Next to these buildings that symbolise secular and divine power, the university has a special status. We are the home of education and edification. We have a significant role in shaping the culture and heritage of Finland. Our newly renovated main building opened in its entirety after a four-year renovation this September. The building is now a living example of how we combine history and tradition with the current and future needs of teaching, learning, research, and innovation.

Today we celebrate outstanding scientists and educators whose breakthroughs in the fields of knowledge, learning and research have contributed to the cultural enrichment and the well-being of humanity. At this ceremony, the World Cultural Council grants the annual Albert Einstein World Award of Science and the José Vasconcelos World Award of Education. We also present Special Acknowledgements to eight people from the University of Helsinki who have achieved outstanding performance in the fields of science and education.

In recent years we have seen an ever-more increasing need for research-based knowledge. Our societies have faced major global crises. Following the Coronavirus years, a war continues to be waged in Europe, whose duration and eventual outcome remain uncertain. Unpredictable global circumstances have brought instability to the economy and new tensions to global politics. States are bolstering their own security arrangements while hybrid threats are increasing.

In many other aspects too, we are facing the unforeseen. We are hearing increasingly worrying messages of the progress of biodiversity loss and climate change. In a short period of time, the development of artificial intelligence has taken big strides forward and changed our everyday lives faster than we ever would have believed. Global and national societal trends are the sum of complex factors.

In the middle of uncertainty and transformation, universities hold the key role in evoking hope. High-level expertise stems from high-quality university education based on research. We universities are also drivers of societal change. We educate experts of the future and produce new knowledge to tackle shared challenges. Skills in analytical and critical thinking and the ability to solve problems are the competences we provide. They are about identifying connections between things, recognising trends, understanding the whole and coming up with new ideas for solving problems. Change and transformation are forces essential to driving us forward. Conducting research is about making

discoveries and knowledge is constantly regenerated. This is why the ability to act amid change is crucial.

We also have a genuine desire to serve the society. For us to live in an equal and prosperous society of opportunity, which ensures the future of higher education and science, is vital. Finland has been a trailblazer in many equality issues. We became the first European country to recognise women's right to vote in 1906. The University of Helsinki has played a key role in the development of the Finnish education system, which has been a worldwide success story. An equal school system, a science-based teacher-training programme and a high regard for teachers are the ingredients that make Finland's education the best in the world.

Dear guests, today we celebrate pioneers and role models in modern technology and human culture as well as introduce promising young scholars. Together all of us are a tremendous force in making a difference in the world. We have at our disposal the power of research-based knowledge, which gives us a role in guiding the future.

One again, I would like to warmly wish you a welcome to this Award Ceremony and I wish you an uplifting evening. Thank you.