

# Speech Päivi Räsänen

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and an honor to speak to you today.

“Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same.”

This wise statement was once said by Mr. Ronald Reagan, one of the former presidents of the United States. It basically means that freedom is fragile. If we do not use our freedoms, if we do not now use our right to speak freely, the space to use our foundational rights will eventually get even smaller.

I am a medical doctor and I have been a Member of the Finnish Parliament for 29 years. From 2004 to 2015, I was the chair of the Finnish Christian Democrats. From 2011 to 2015, I was the Minister of the Interior of Finland, and responsible also for church affairs. I am also a member of City council, County council and Church council. My husband, who is with me here today, is a Doctor of Theology and the Principal of the Finnish Lutheran Mission Bible College.

In 2021, the Prosecutor General of Finland brought three separate charges against me. This process started with a tweet I made in June 2019, where I directed a question to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland that had signed up to officially support a Pride event. The main content of my post was a photo of verses 24-27 of Romans chapter 1 of the New Testament, where Apostle Paul teaches that homosexual relations are sinful. The other charge is about an old pamphlet which takes a stand on sexuality and marriage from a Christian perspective, written already in 2004. Also, Bishop Juhana Pohjola was prosecuted because he is responsible for publishing and making available the pamphlet. It felt absurd to witness a bishop, carrying a big cross around her neck, being prosecuted at the court room. The third charge is about my biblical views presented in one humorous radio interview.

The points of view for which I have been accused do not deviate from so-called classical Christianity, nor does my view on marriage deviate from the official policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. The filing of the charges was preceded by 1,5 years of police investigation and several long police interrogations, altogether 13 hours. The situation felt unreal. Just few years ago I was in charge of the police as a minister of interior and then I was sitting in the police station interrogated, having the Bible on the table. In social media there was a joke that Päivi Räsänen is once again going to have a Bible study at the police station. The police asked if I agree to delete within two weeks my writings. I answered no, and that I stand behind these teachings of the Bible, whatever the consequences are.

The possible sentence for the crime of ethnic agitation would have been up to two years imprisonment or a fine. In the Finnish law it falls within the “war crimes” section of the

criminal code. The law was intended to prevent speech that may lead to ethnic violence or even genocide. Yet now the law is being used to prosecute my speech. A dangerous problem would be censorship: an order to remove social media updates or a ban on posting. That sentence would open the floodgates to a ban on similar publications and the threat of modern book burnings.

In summary, the prosecution stated that everyone can believe what they want to and agreed that citing the Bible is allowed, but it was also said that free speech should be limited in the outward expression of religion. That's why they argue that publishing my beliefs is criminal. I encountered this same kind of limited understanding of religious freedom when I was the minister responsible for church affairs and had a discussion with the Chinese minister in charge of religious matters. He said that in China you can believe in your own mind whatever, but it is necessary to restrict the freedom to express your faith if it increases tensions in the society.

In public, the prosecutor general has stated that “although Räsänen was convicted, it does not mean that the Bibles should be removed from the libraries. You can refer to the Bible, Koran or Mein Kampf, because it is not forbidden to discuss about historical texts. But what is essential is that do you agree with it.” The prosecution has considered the core teaching of the Christian faith offensive. The prosecution did not accept the biblical view of man that the doctrine of sin does not diminish the dignity of man. Every human being is equally valuable, but also sinful and in need of Jesus' grace.

The Helsinki District Court issued a unanimous, clear acquittal and acquitted me of all the three charges in 2022. The ruling was what I expected. I had hoped that the prosecutor would have settled for this ruling, but the prosecutor appealed the ruling to the Court of Appeal. Last November, the Helsinki Court of Appeal ruled unanimously that all the charges against me had again been dismissed. The central points of the clear and concise ruling was: the intent of my writings and communication was not to defame or slander anyone, nor did they contain anything illegal. This was a victory for free speech and freedom of religion.

Again, I had hoped that the prosecutor was satisfied with the Appellate Court ruling. However, the Prosecutor General announced that he will ask the Supreme Court for permission to appeal the unanimous acquittal of the Court of Appeal. This decision totally surprised me. In April, just a couple of weeks ago, the Supreme Court granted the prosecutor the leave to appeal. We do yet not know when the third trial concerning my statement will take place.

But I am confident and calm. I am ready to continue to defend free speech and freedom of also before the European Court of Human Rights, because there is chance the case will end up there eventually.

Altogether six judges from two courts did not find anything illegal in my texts, but now I will continue to fight for freedom of speech before the Supreme Court. I can only understand this all from the point of view that this case is a precedent. This court case is historic for freedom

of expression and religion. At the core of the trial is the question of whether it is allowed to share the teaching of the Bible and publicly agree with them.

The acquittal from the Supreme Court would establish a stronger legal precedent on freedom of expression and religion compared to the rulings of the lower instance courts. This would serve as a legal guide regarding any similar charges in the future. The ruling of the Supreme Court would have a significant impact on legislation in Europe. It would also more strongly secure the freedom of Christians to speak about the Bible's teachings.

Dear friends,

The high international interest in my court case rises from the concern that if this kind of questioning of free speech is possible in a country like Finland, which has long roots in Christian culture and values and a good reputation regarding free speech internationally, the same is possible anywhere. Finland's criminal justice system and laws about incitement are similar to those of most other countries in Europe.

Most European countries are actively pursuing more censorship. Nowadays it is politically incorrect to say anything negative about for example gender ideology or to defend the human rights of unborn babies. Despite having no basis in international law, all European Union member states have vague and subjective 'hate speech' laws. These laws, with the right police and prosecutor, can easily be weaponised against practically any person and any form of speech. The elections for the European Parliament are now approaching, and it is important that we defend freedom of speech at the European level.

George Orwell, who sided with the Communists during the Spanish Civil War, became disillusioned and then a passionate critic of Communism. Orwell used the term "Newspeak" in his dystopian novel 1984 for Communist language control. Newspeak in "1984" was a way for the party to control people of the fictional "Oceania." Basically, Newspeak was the language demanded by the party and inculcated into society. It prevented Oceanians from violating any "thought crimes" against the party. People wouldn't have words to describe how they think or feel and so were controlled.

The mere fact that there is an ongoing trial, even without a conviction, has a restrictive effect on freedom of expression. But, amid all these challenges we are facing, we need to understand that the international law provides a robust framework for freedom of speech and is on our side.

The core biblical values and the Christian view of man are currently being strongly questioned in our societies. The shift from a society that appreciates praying and embraces Christianity to a more liberal and secular one has taken place in a relatively short period of time. The breaking of the Christian worldview is visible whether we think of the protection of life at the very beginning or at the end of life or defending marriage as a union between man and wife. If

we go a little bit back in time, I could not have imagined that someday I would need to be in a court room defending my faith based on the Bible. If someone would have asked how many genders there exist at the time when I started my career as an MP, people would have considered the questioner quite stupid.

Freedom of expression is one of the most fundamental freedoms and features prominently in all major human rights treaties and national constitutions. Protections for this fundamental freedom are informed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights likewise protects freedom of expression. And at the regional level, Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights protects the right to freedom of expression, as does Article 11 of the EU Charter.

In the Court, I appealed to the Constitution of Finland and to these international conventions that guarantee the freedom of speech and religion. These rights are threatened when people stop using them. The existence and importance of human rights is widely affirmed across Western societies. These rights are believed to be universal, meaning they belong to every human.

So called hate speech laws shrink the boundaries of free speech and create a chilling effect on a variety of important conversations. Criminalizing speech through 'hate-speech' laws shuts down important public debates and poses a grave threat to our democracies. We must be able to disagree and cope with speech that insults our feelings. Many questions are so debatable and contradictory that we must have the possibility of discussing.

We Christians must have the possibility and right to agree with the Bible and to confess our faith publicly. I have also stressed that you do not need to agree with my views to defend free speech and freedom of religion. It is precisely when we disagree that we need freedom of expression. I want to encourage you to use your foundational freedoms and rights in the public.

I have considered it a privilege and an honour to defend freedom of expression, which is a fundamental right in a democratic state. In this ordeal, I have very concretely felt the power of prayer on behalf of me and Finland during this time. I have been encouraged by the thousands of messages I have received from Finland and abroad, in which people have told how God has through this case encouraged them to pray and trust God's word. I trust that the entire process is in God's hands and that this all has a purpose. This has opened a wonderful opportunity to bring the message of the Gospel into the courtroom.

I want to say a special thank you for the thousands of encouragements I have received from the Dutch people. Henk Jan van Schothorst from Christian Council International flew all the way from the Netherlands to Helsinki to hand me the names of all the lovely people who were supporting me during my trial. I have been deeply touched by all of this and I am grateful for the support. Thank you so much for your attention and God bless you all!