

National Prosecution Authority of Finland
Office of the Prosecutor General
Lintulahdenkuja 4, FI-00530
Helsinki

August 2023

Collective Petition to Drop Unjust Charges Against Päivi Räsänen and Bishop Juhana Pohjola for Exercising their Right to Freedom of Religion and Belief

Dear Ari-Pekka Koivisto,

We, the undersigned, represent a diverse and concerned group of individuals observing the troubling developments taking place in Finland, namely in the case of Päivi Räsänen and Bishop Juhana Pohjola. Since 2019, Räsänen, a member of Parliament, and Pohjola, a Lutheran Bishop, have faced accusations of “hate speech” after expressing their sincerely held religious beliefs. The two have been maliciously dragged through the Finnish legal system and despite a unanimous acquittal of the charges by the Helsinki District Court last March, a prosecutor under your supervision has appealed these charges, making clear their mission to censor Christian beliefs.

The right to freedom of speech and freedom of religion and belief are fundamental rights protected in all major human rights treaties, which Finland has ratified. The Constitution of Finland also explicitly provides a protection for the right to religious freedom under Section 11.

At the acquittal trial last March, these principles were reaffirmed when the court said “...it is not for the district court to interpret biblical concepts.” The court believes that Räsänen had sought to “defend the concept of family and marriage between a man and a woman,” and that “if some people found the statements offensive, there must be an overriding social reason for interfering with and restricting freedom of expression.”

Räsänen, Pohjola, and every Finn should have the right to express their religious beliefs – even the right to express no religious beliefs at all – and it is time for Finland to uphold the promises it has made. As we approach the beginning of the appeal trial on August 31, we ask that in your authority as the General Prosecutor of Finland, that you call on the prosecution to drop these unjust charges.

Consider the message Finland will send if two individuals are convicted for tweeting a Bible verse or publishing religious materials - that your country is not safe for people to express their religious beliefs. This message would be damaging and harmful to the reputation that Finland has proudly held as a free, democratic society. We ask you to intervene and reverse that message before it's too late; letting the global stage know that Finland is committed to religious freedom for all.

Thank you for your attention to this issue. We remain hopeful that your intervention will uphold the principles upon which the nation of Finland has built.

Sincerely,

International Christian Concern

And the undersigned: