

Address by the Most Revd Dr Kari Mäkinen, Archbishop of Turku and Finland, at the CEC Church and Society Commission's Consultation 'Churches together for Human Rights' Embargo 7.3.2013 at 0915.

Esteemed participants, sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus,

I am honoured to welcome you in Finland on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

It should be natural for the churches to speak about human rights, the reason for our gathering today, as this concept is embedded in the basic Christian narrative even if we approached the issue from different angles. In the beginning, God created all human beings equal. Through his very life, Christ broke down the hierarchies of social and religious distinction. In this way, the Incarnation means returning to the radically inclusive anthropology of the Creation, testifying of the infinite worth and equality of all human beings in the face of their Creator. This is the foundation of the Christian anthropology and a mystery worth contemplating for our churches today.

Furthermore, this is a natural starting point for the European churches in particular, because the importance of the Creation and the Incarnation has been emphasized through the concept *of* and discourse *on* human rights in the European context. This discourse was born in the 18th century, though its content is much older, stemming from the core of Christian anthropology.

When the churches now speak about human rights, we should remark an important feature of the first 18th century human rights declarations. Both in France and in the USA, human rights was argued on the basis of universality, the rights entitled to all people on the basis of their humanity, when in practice these rights were reserved only to the wealthy white men, too blind to see those excluded.

What is significant is the blindness, caused by the human sinfulness. It would be arrogant to think that the sin and blindness belong only to the 18th century, and that we were free of them now when there has been an emphasis to extend the human rights to cover people of all colours, genders and social classes. This would be as false as to think that the history and present day of our churches would be completely free of the stain of violating the human rights and human dignity.

We need to acknowledge our own blindness and the shadows we don't recognize. Therefore we need to speak about the human rights, both boldly and humbly. We need to be bold to defend the infinite value of each and every person and thus participate in building up responsible society.

At the same time we need to be humble to recognize our own limitations, arising from our own particular contexts, and realize that the call to repentance concerns ourselves as well. When we speak about universal human rights, we need to be especially careful to recognize when we, in fact, consider ourselves somewhat more entitled than others; not in principle, but in practice.

This is the particular challenge for our European churches, a challenge that should direct us to observe ourselves critically in the global and the European context – and I speak now as a representative of the affluent European North – and to examine how our discourse and views are tied up with our social and economic status. This has become all the more important with the rising social inequality in Europe.

Therefore, when we gather together as churches to consider human rights, we should contemplate two things: First, the very foundation of human rights in the Creation and Incarnation; and second, our own

blindness and failure to honour them. As churches we are called to confess our faith and our sins. We are called to follow Christ both boldly and humbly.

With these thoughts I want to welcome you in Finland. I pray God would give you wisdom and insight beyond the immediate, and I hope you would enjoy your stay with us.