

Opening Address

Governor Eino Siuruainen
Provincial Government of Oulu
Finland

Her excellence the President of Finland, Mrs Tarja Halonen, His Excellence the President of Iceland, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, Highly honored governors, mayors, rectors, professors, participants, Ladies and Gentlemen!

As the chairman of the NRF Host Planning Committee it is my great pleasure to welcome the highly honored guests, all experts and participants attending this meeting, starting here in Oulu. We really honor that among us today we have two very prominent presidents, who are very interested in promoting northern research and wellbeing in their countries as well as in the whole of the Circumpolar North. They have done a lot of work to promote northern research and innovative economic and social development. We are very thankful for that! We are also very satisfied that so many experts have arrived to attend this meeting.

As the governor of the province of Oulu and as the former professor of geography in the University of Oulu I want to give You, Ladies and Gentlemen, some coordinates where You have arrived. In the whole northern circumpolar world Finland is a country which includes the total population north of the 60 degree northern latitude. Finnish people are living between the 60 to 70 degrees of northern latitude. After the latest glacier, ending some 10000 years ago, Fenno-Ugric tribes came to live in the eastern part of the country. The open fire ash, found in the old living grounds, shows that the first settlement sites were located just in the eastern part of our province. Rock paintings from the Stone Age have been found in Suomussalmi as well as around the White Sea surroundings. Historically our settlement roots are very deep in the Northern ground.

The location of Finland is very prominent and interesting. Our traditions, religion, legislation and habits are of two origins. In early history Finland was a part of Swe-

den. Swedish kings had an interest to settle the sparsely populated and undivided North. Swedish people settled our coastlands in the South and in the West. Finnish people were activated to move to the North. The same pursue was also among the Slavic tribes, first Novgorod and afterwards the combined Russian Empire. The Finnish society has now numerous traditions and legislation dating back to Swedish and Russian periods. Finland is a bilingual country, and we have two official churches, Lutheran and Greek Orthodox Churches. Since the year 1917 Finland has been an independent Republic forming a bridge between the East and the West.

Today this geographical and historical experience is an important treasure. As a member of the European Union Finland is an expert in the eastern relations. Present Russia with huge natural resources and some 150 million people is a prominent country. Though Finland is a small country with 5.2 million people, her knowledge, experience and location means a lot of possibilities in the circumpolar co-operation. So, today all participants of this Research Forum have arrived to an interesting country and region. We are living in the real heart of the EU Northern Dimension.

The 400 years old city of Oulu has become famous for high knowledge and ICT industry. This modern city has been ranked among the twenty most innovative technological centers in the world. This is due to the excellent University of Oulu, technological research, excellent industry and good co-operation. About 14000 people are employed in high tech jobs. This region can give a lot of knowledge and experience to the circumpolar co-operation, not only in economy, but also in services and culture.

Highly honored guests!

This Open Research Forum starts here in Oulu, but continues in Tornio, Haparanda and Luleå. The structure shows that the world here is more and more borderless. The Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland are an excellent example on borderless co-operation. For a long time we did not need any passport at the border.

Tornio - Haparanda border area is a good example for international co-operation. Though the cities belong to two states they are making the future as one economic and social entity. Luleå, the capital of Norbotten, is famous for technology and northern research. Oulu -

Luleå co-operation supports the Bothnia Arch development. That will give good results for the international circumpolar co-operation.

Ladies and gentlemen

It is my great honor to welcome the Presidents of Finland and Iceland, as well as all participants to this 4th Open Northern Research Forum. I hope we are gaining results which will help all people living in the Circumpolar North.

Welcome and enjoy your stay in the heart of Northern Fennoscandia!