

Speech by Acting CS at Independence Day of Finland Reception (English only) (with photo)

Following is the speech by the Acting Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Cheuk Wing-hing, at the Independence Day of Finland Reception today (December 6):

Consul General (Mr Timo Kantola), Deputy Commissioner Fang Jianming (Deputy Commissioner of the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), ladies and gentlemen,

Hyvää iltaa. In case some of you do not have the faintest idea what I was trying to say in Finnish, here is the English translation – good evening. Hello everyone, I am delighted to join you at this reception to celebrate Finnish Independence Day.

Congratulations to our friends from Finland on your country's many achievements during your 107 years of independence. Today, Finland is one of the happiest, healthiest, safest, greenest and best-educated places on Earth.

Despite our geographical and cultural differences, I am pleased to say that Finland and Hong Kong enjoy strong collaboration, notably in areas that put both places at the top end of the United Nations Human Development Index.

One such area is education. With a well-developed web of 54 international schools and five universities that ranked in the world's top 100, Hong Kong prides itself on being a premier education hub in Asia. Finnish education is so creative and successful that this time last year, the Education University of Hong Kong established a Global Research Institute for Finnish Education. Through this initiative, we can better understand Finland's pioneering education system and integrate research findings into educational development. Closer links with Finnish institutions will also enable us to advance education and tackle challenges from a global perspective. I look forward to seeing the research outcome by the Global Research Institute for Finnish Education, which may provide useful insight into building a happier learning environment for our students in Hong Kong.

To attract more talent to Hong Kong to support our economic and other developments, we have a Top Talent Pass Scheme under which graduates of 200 universities worldwide can be admitted to settle here. The University of Helsinki is on the list of eligible universities and we have indeed approved applications made by its graduates. We certainly would love to see more Finnish talent joining the scheme to enrich our pool of talent and our internationalism.

Speaking of talent, I share the Consul General's enthusiasm over the

appointment of Finnish conductor Tarmo Peltokoski as the next Music Director of the acclaimed Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra (HK Phil). Although he will only take up the new role in the 2026/27 season, Maestro Peltokoski has already won the hearts of local audiences with his performances here on several previous occasions. Under his baton, we can look forward to the further success of the HK Phil as a flagship brand of our city.

I take delight in telling the Consul General and the guests in this room that the number of visitors from Finland to Hong Kong is returning to pre-pandemic levels. In the first 10 months of this year, we received around 9 500 visitors from Finland, compared to 8 300 for the whole of last year. I am optimistic that this number will continue to go up, after the Central Authority's recent introduction of 15-day visa-free travel to the Mainland for residents of Finland and other Nordic countries.

In fact, we are eagerly anticipating the visit later this month of Finland's best-known resident! Yes, Santa Claus is preparing to leave his Lapland home for his annual round-the-world-trip to deliver Christmas gifts to the young and the young-at-heart!

On this note, I wish our Finnish friends a memorable Independence Day and a very enjoyable festive season. Thank you.

