



EEA Statement on Päivi Räsänen

May 2021

The European Evangelical Alliance (EEA) defends freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression for people of all faiths and none. These human rights are vital pillars of democracy.

EEA is therefore dismayed to hear of a case in Finland of a woman who faces prosecution and up to 2 years in prison for 3 separate cases for expressing biblical views.

The police were asked to investigate 3 incidents of supposed “hate speech”, or more precisely in Finnish law “ethnic agitation”. On each occasion, they concluded that there was no case to answer. In the case of a brochure published in 2004, the police added that, if it was decided that biblical views were considered per se to count as agitation, then it would have to become a crime to make the Bible available. Clearly, such a situation would be ludicrous. Foundational issues of freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression are both at stake.

Despite the police’s warning, the Public Prosecutor has decided to proceed with the prosecution of the individual at the heart of this situation; Päivi Räsänen, former Minister of the Interior of Finland.

International human rights law protects the fundamental right to freedom of expression. Under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, people have the right to express their views in public.

The United Nation’s Rabat Plan of Action has set certain criteria for defining hate speech. In all three situations for which she stands trial, Päivi Räsänen’s actions do not cross the Rabat threshold for hate speech. The context, content and form of her

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words were fine. There is no hint of intent, likelihood or imminence of acts of hatred happening. The only thing one could say is that, as a public figure, Mrs Räsänen's words have reach. But there is obviously no problem in having reach when the content, form and context were all fine.

Is the Public Prosecutor attempting to redefine human rights law? Freedom of expression gives the right for anyone to share their opinion. The right to freedom of expression exists to legally protect those that express views which may offend, shock or disturb others.

Therefore, EEA calls upon the Finnish court system to uphold freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief. We urge the Finnish government to make clear its unequivocal support for these fundamental freedoms and the Rabat Plan of Action's threshold for hate speech.

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