

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

January 24, 2022

The Honorable Rashad Hussain
U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Ambassador Hussain:

Congratulations on your confirmation as the United States Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. As avid proponents of the inalienable right to freely practice one's faith, we understand the importance of the role you now serve. As you carry out this role, we write to remind you that threats to this cherished freedom can come from the most unlikely of places, and we cannot remain silent on human rights abuses even when they are being committed by a friend and ally. Among today's many threats to religious freedom, we urge you to monitor the alarming case in Finland against two Christians who have voiced their deeply held convictions.

On January 24, 2022, the Helsinki Criminal Court will consider charges against Päivi Räsänen, a member of Finland's parliament and former interior minister, as well as Juhana Pohjola, a Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland. According to an indictment authored by Finland's Prosecutor General Raija Toiviainen, both Räsänen's and Pohjola's past statements affirming their religious beliefs violate Finland's law against hate speech. The maximum sentence is two years imprisonment. Specifically, the charges reference a 2019 tweet by MP Räsänen that quotes the Bible and criticizes the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland's decision to sponsor a Helsinki Pride Parade. The second charge is related to a remark MP Räsänen made in 2019 speculating on the immutability of homosexuality while she was a guest on a radio discussion show. The third charge—under which Bishop Juhana Pohjola has also been accused—relates to a pamphlet published in 2004, before the enactment of Finland's hate speech law, by the Luther Foundation of Finland titled, "As Man and Woman He Created Them: Homosexuality and the Challenge to the Christian Concept of Man."

It is our understanding that Finnish authorities believe that these actions constitute hate speech, even though these statements reflect a conception of marriage and sexuality that is upheld not just by hundreds of millions of Christians, but also by many Muslims and Jews worldwide. We are greatly concerned that the use of Finnish law is tantamount to a secular blasphemy law. It could open the door for prosecution of other devout Christians, Muslims, Jews and adherents of other faiths for publicly stating their religious beliefs that may conflict with secular trends. We believe that, regardless of whether Finnish prosecutors agree with the religious beliefs that MP Räsänen and Bishop Pohjola have expressed, all people have a

fundamental right to the freedoms of religion and speech, which should be upheld without fear of government interference.

We greatly appreciate the longstanding and positive relationship between the United States and Finland. Our countries enjoy significant historic, cultural, economic, and security ties that speak to the values that we both share. This is precisely why we are concerned with these alarming developments that stand to weaken Finland's longstanding commitment to the bedrock rights of freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

Furthering the international right to religious freedom has been a cornerstone of American foreign policy. As such, we urge you to raise these concerns with the Finnish government as proceedings continue against MP Räsänen and Bishop Pohjola, condemn these unjust prosecutions, and continue to monitor other developments that threaten religious freedom in Finland and Europe.

We thank you for your attention to these matters.

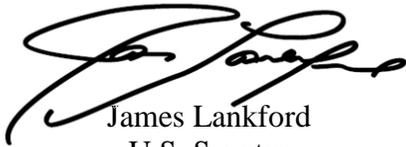
Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Josh Hawley
U.S. Senator



James Lankford
U.S. Senator



James M. Inhofe
U.S. Senator



Mike Braun
U.S. Senator