

**SPEECH BY JAANA HUSU-KALLIO AT THE HIGH-LEVEL PUBLICATION EVENT “*CLIMATE CHANGE
IMPACTS ON PLANT HEALTH*”**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Climate change is the biggest existential threat to human societies – and climate change keeps progressing at an alarming rate! Already now, we can see the impacts of climate change around the world: heatwaves of unforeseen intensity stifle our lands and cities; forest fires and wildfires of gigantic proportions consume our carbon sinks and pollute our air; massive floods are affecting our cities and farmlands; storms and hurricanes of ever-increasing intensities and frequencies are threatening our environments; and droughts of biblical magnitudes are impacting agricultural communities around the world. These, Ladies and Gentlemen, are the wild “mood-swings” of a climate out of balance! These are the symptoms of anthropogenic climate change and we, as the causal agents of climate change, have to undertake our best efforts the most urgently to prevent further climate warming and to adapt to the changed climatic conditions and their impact on the environment.

Climate change is not only causing serious extreme weather events – it also affects peace. In Finland, we believe that there are three different types of peace that are fundamental to our wellbeing: peace as the absence of war; peace within our societies; and peace with the environment. Climate change has an impact on all three of them, and if we fail to make peace with the environment, domestic and international conflicts are likely to follow. The effects of climate change, such as hunger, desertification, migration and overpopulation of the remaining temperate regions will quickly turn into hard security issues. Against this backdrop, the Finnish Government has pledged to make Finland carbon neutral by 2035.

Indeed, peace and security go hand in hand – without peace there is no security, and vice versa. Perhaps one of the biggest contributors to peace is food security. The right to food is a human right, which protects the rights of all humans to be free from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. The absence of food security may ultimately result in the deterioration of global security, eventually corroding peace on all levels – nationally, regionally and globally. Climate change and plant health are two of the main threats to a food-secure world, and both are standing at the centre of our efforts to establish sustainable food systems around the world.

Undeniably, biodiversity preservation is one of the cornerstones of being at piece with the environment. An incredible 40 per cent of all plant species worldwide are threatened by extinction. Many of these plant species are still undescribed and many may contain medicinal properties beneficial to us in our fight to find cures to diseases. This predicted loss of the diversity of our flora derives to a certain degree from the introduction of alien invasive plant pests and diseases. Climate change and plant pests and diseases need to be addressed in order to maintain biodiversity and thus ensure our future well-being. Plant health is most certainly in our focus in biodiversity protection.

No individual country can fight climate change alone. How well we succeed in preventing further climate warming and adapting to the changed climatic conditions depends on the concerted efforts of all countries and the leadership provided by international organizations. The Government of Finland looks very much towards the leadership of the United Nations and it is our declared policy to stimulate actions with regard to climate change adaptation and mitigation. This, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the reason why Finland has promoted the investigation of climate change impacts on plant health within the context of the International Plant Protection Convention and the International Year of Plant Health 2020.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a veterinarian, I know very well that climatic conditions and weather events are important factors affecting the natural distribution of pests and diseases. Anthropogenic climate change has impaired our core ecological processes, from genetic diversity to ecosystem function. Our knowledge about the impact of global warming on plant pests and diseases, however, has been sketchy and fragmented. We need to extend our knowledge on how climate change affects the distribution of plant pests and diseases. We need plant health tools to predict how the population dynamics of plant pests and diseases develop under changed climatic conditions. There will be changes in the potential for damages caused by plant pests and diseases. How can we adjust our surveillance and monitoring to the changed conditions and behaviours of plant pests and diseases?

These are just some of the issues we must address when dealing with the impact of climate change on plant health. We need to undertake more plant health-related research in order to develop a scientific basis on which we can make sensible political decisions. We need to develop new or improved international mechanisms to inform each other about changed plant health situations or parameters so that we could react, in the shortest time possible, to new threats posed by plant pests and diseases. Finally, we need to strengthen the capacity of the many disadvantaged countries to respond to plant health emergencies. We may temporarily be able to overcome a poor harvest caused by a pest or a disease by buying food from elsewhere. But what to do when such situations repeatedly occur on a large scale and markets cannot respond to the demand?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will now come to the conclusion of my speech. This is one of the last events organized for the International Year of Plant Health. As the originator of the International Year, the Government of Finland is very happy that the review study on the impacts of climate change on plant health has matured into one of the legacy activities of the IYPH 2020. We would like it very much if in ten or twenty years the International Year of Plant Health 2020 will be remembered as the “launching pad” for the development of an internationally agreed policy on how to address climate change impacts on plant health. In my eyes, this alone would constitute the success of the International Year of Plant Health 2020.

For this reason, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland is proud to have promoted and supported this study on climate change effects on plant health. We are delighted that the IPPC has, in its strategic framework, identified climate change impacts on plant health as an important subject to be addressed in the near future. Encouraged by the scientifically based recommendations of the study, we sincerely hope that they will serve as the stepping-stone for the development of international actions. Our sincere desire is that humankind will be able to address the challenges of climate change and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland is truly privileged to have played its small part in it.

Thank you for your attention.