

## **SPEECH UPON INAUGURATION OF THE SAJOS SÁMI CULTURAL CENTRE 3rd APRIL 2012**

Honourable President of the Republic of Finland, Mrs Haukio, buorit  
Sámedikkiid politihkalaš jodiheaddjit, dear guests!

Sometimes, one's hopes and dreams come true. This is particularly so if you remain true to your dreams and work long term to achieve them. The decades-long wish of the Finnish Sámi for a cultural centre of their own has now been fulfilled. Today, we can celebrate the inauguration of the centre and enjoy the fruits of our labour.

Although our journey to this wonderful day has been long, sometimes exhausting, it has been an inspiring and positive experience. To understand the general picture, we have to return to 1994. Then, in its Bill for the establishment of Sámi cultural autonomy, the Finnish government stated to Parliament that it "would be appropriate to provide the forthcoming Sámi Parliament with its own premises, like those of the Norwegian Sámi Parliament and those proposed for the Swedish Sámi Parliament." In line with this proposal, in 2000 the Sámi Parliament began preparations for the Sajos Sámi Cultural Centre project. As a result, multifaceted and rigorous master planning was carried out between 2000 and 2007. This work was chiefly funded from EU project support funds approved by EU agencies engaged in Lapland. A total of almost one million, two-hundred-thousand euros were granted by EU Structural Fund programmes.

After intensive preparatory work, project investment funding took shape in the spring of 2007, when the Region of Lapland granted five million euros of EU funding and the Finnish Government entered the project in the state budget for 2008 to 2011. These decisions finally put the project on a proper footing. Senate Properties, a builder of public sector premises, took charge of the project's practical achievement in the autumn of 2007.

As project planning continued, challenges arose in reconciling varying user requirements. For example, this hall, the Dolla Auditorium, needs to convert into a meeting and conference facility, as well as a teaching room, and a venue for musical, cinema and theatre performances. Despite this, I think that we succeeded well in our planning work. Our special thanks go to the young designers of Halo Architects, the winner of the architectural competition, for their wonderful co-operation.

The building's main user will be the Sámi Parliament, with the Sámi Education Institute as the second primary user. Other users are the Sámi Archive (under The National Archives Service of Finland), the Sámi Library (run by the Municipality of Inari), SámiSoster (Sámi Association for Health and Social Issues), Duodji Shop (which sells Sámi handicrafts), the Anarâškiela servi association for the Inari Sámi language, the Lapland Regional State Administrative Agency and the Galla restaurant.

Sajos is primarily intended for use by the Sámi. It is meant as a symbol of Sámi autonomy and the living and evolving Sámi culture. As such, its key purpose is, firstly, to nurture traditional Sámi culture and, secondly, to see to its renewal and development. Sajos is the Sámi parliament building, a versatile activity centre and a meeting place and forum. This is wonderfully captured by the building's name in the Inari Sámi language, Sajos. Of old, this word refers to a base or camp where people met, and even spent longer periods of time, around a campfire. The name was suggested by Matti Morottaja, an Inari Sámi.

In addition to its main purpose, thanks to its state-of-the-art, high-quality meeting rooms and ultramodern studio facilities, Sajos offers excellent options for organising various meetings, conferences and events in a unique environment. In this way, Sajos will revive the area's business life and reinforce its vitality in other ways.

Already, on the basis of a few months' use, I can confirm that these aims are being fulfilled. Since the beginning of the year, a range of events and meetings have been held in Sajos. So much interest has been raised on a wider basis that it receives many visitors every day, including from abroad. In addition, the completion of Sajos has been a huge relief to both the Sámi Parliament and its secretariat. After many years of moving from

place to place, we can at last work in proper premises under the same roof, or even sharing a floor and landing. Of course, the same is true of other users of the building.

Honourable President of the Republic, Mrs Haukio, dear guests! I am aware that many hopes and demands are pinned on Sajos, among the Sámi and in wider circles within the region. Only after a few years' experience can we assess how well the building works in practice and the extent to which the related hopes and expectations will be met. However, I both hope and believe that, after the busy running-in period, when we have properly settled into the building and ordered our papers and thoughts, those of us working from Sajos will be able to meet these challenges.

Finally, on behalf of Sajos' users and myself, I would like to give my warm thanks to the individual actors and organisations that influenced and participated in the creation of Sajos; as well as the funding bodies, Senate Properties, the Municipality of Inari, architectural and other designers, and supervisors and subcontractors. My special thanks go those who worked on behalf of the main contractor, Keski-Suomen Betonirakenne, for their responsible, service-minded work. In every case, cooperation has been excellent. Without you, the Sajos Sámi Cultural Centre would never have moved off the drawing board. My heartfelt thanks to you!

May Sajos prove useful to the Sámi and other citizens and, in particular, may it inspire enthusiasm and belief in younger generations of Sámi, in striving for the preservation and renewal of their own culture!

Juha Guttorm,  
Director of Administration