

Speech 7 September 2007 / **President Martti Ahtisaari**

The Inauguration of the Kvarken World Natural Heritage Site

Ladies and Gentlemen, Inhabitants of the Unesco World Heritage Site

It is a great privilege to inaugurate the Kvarken Archipelago, the first World Natural Heritage Site in Finland, together with inhabitants of the site and guests from far away. Ten years ago, I inaugurated the Replot Bridge which today can be seen as a grand entrance to the World Natural Heritage Site.

The greatest international recognition which a natural reserve can receive is to be listed on Unesco's World Heritage List. At present, there are only 166 natural reserves in the World Heritage List, and only four of the reserves are situated in the naturally beautiful Nordic Countries: Lapponia in Swedish Lapland, Geiranger and Naeroy fjords in Norway, Illusat glacier in Greenland, and Kvarken Archipelago-High Coast in Finland.

This World Natural Heritage Site is an excellent example of profound Nordic cooperation. After all, the Kvarken Archipelago forms a transboundary World Heritage Site with the Swedish High Coast, located within a hundred kilometers from the Kvarken Archipelago.

Around the world, World Heritage Sites are threatened by wars, terrorism, natural catastrophes, and mass tourism. The transboundary World Heritage of Sweden and Finland, the Kvarken Archipelago-High Coast, is in safe hands and far from threats. Nevertheless, preserving and developing our World Heritage Site is still a very important mission, considering future inhabitants and visitors.

Especially in these surroundings where land uplift continues to shape the scenery, our world is changing. Zacharias Topelius once wrote in *Maamme kirja*, or *The Book of Our Land*:

“On both sides of the Gulf of Bothnia, people have been aware of this mysterious phenomenon. The land rises from the sea, and the sea makes way for the bank which proceeds. The bay lowers, forcing ports to relocate merely to keep up with the fleeing sea. Thus Finland, the daughter of the Baltic Sea, is presented with a principality at hundred-year intervals.” (Translated from Topelius 1873, 4-5)

Nowadays, land uprising is a scientific fact, and therefore the Kvarken Archipelago-High Coast has been presented with a World Heritage status on geological grounds. The Kvarken Archipelago-High Coast is a World Natural Heritage Site which, a hundred years ago, was located in Sweden, and two hundred years ago in Russia. Today, the site unites two sister nations.

