Finnish lawmaker on trial for ‘hate speech’ on traditional marriage

By Peter Pinedo

Finnish lawmaker Päivi Räsänen is on trial this week for “hate speech” and “ethnic agitation” after publicly sharing in 2019 her biblical, religious views on marriage as between one man and one woman.

Räsänen, 63, is being tried for violating Finland’s hate speech laws by using Bible verses to express her support for traditional marriage.

Her trial will take place on Aug. 31 and Sept. 1.

In the 2019 tweet that landed Räsänen in her current legal troubles, she criticized her denomination for embracing LGBTQ+ ideology, asking how these views could be reconciled with Scripture. In the tweet, she referenced Romans 1:24-27, which clearly states that homosexual activity is against God’s will.

Along with Räsänen, a Finnish Lutheran bishop named Juhana Pohjola is also being tried for hate speech for publishing a pamphlet written by Räsänen that advocated for the biblical understanding of sexuality and marriage.

Though they were unanimously acquitted by a Finnish District Court in 2022, prosecutors appealed their acquittal to the Helsinki Court of Appeal.

Now, the two are facing tens of thousands of Euros in fines and possibly two years in prison if they are found guilty. Additionally, the court could also rule to censor Räsänen's publications.

Finnish lawmaker Päivi Räsänen (right) and Lutheran Bishop Juhana Pohjola are both on trial for violating Finland's "hate speech" laws. Credit: Alliance Defending Freedom International

Räsänen and Pohjola are being represented by the Alliance Defending Freedom International (ADF).

Paul Coleman, executive director of ADF International, said in a press release last week that "the relentless prosecution" of Räsänen has not only consumed four years of her life but "also intimidates others into silence."

"In a democratic society, everyone should be free to share their beliefs without fear of state prosecution," Coleman said. "Criminalizing speech through so-called 'hate-speech' laws shuts down important public debates and endangers democracy."

Räsänen, who is a mother of five and grandmother of 10 as well as a member of Finland's Parliament, told EWTN's Tracy Sabol in a Monday interview that despite facing renewed persecution, she trusts "that this whole process is in God's hands" and that she is confident that she will once again be acquitted of the hate speech charges.

U.S. lawmakers defend Räsänen

Fifteen U.S. lawmakers, led by Republican Rep. Chip Roy of Texas, signed onto an Aug. 8 letter in support of Räsänen and all Christians' right to free speech.

The strongly worded letter was addressed to Rashad Hussain and Douglas Hickey, Biden's U.S. ambassador at large for international religious freedom and the U.S. ambassador to Finland, respectively.

"The prosecutor," the letter said, "is dead set on weaponizing the power of Finland's legal system to silence not just a member of Parliament and Lutheran bishop but millions of Finnish Christians who dare to exercise their natural rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion in the public square."

The lawmakers further said that Räsänen's case holds greater significance for all Christians throughout the Western world.

"History will remember this case for either stopping the madness or as the beginning of the end as the West declares open war on Christianity," the lawmakers wrote, adding that "the selective targeting of these high-profile individuals is designed to systematically chill others' speech under the threat of legal harassment and social stigmatism."

In a Tuesday tweet, Roy said that "no American, no Finn, and no human should face legal harassment for simply living out their religious beliefs."

All 15 lawmakers who signed the letter are Republican members of the House of Representatives.

'Christian teachings on trial'

According to a Tuesday ADF statement to the media, "Christian teachings [are] on trial" in Finland. Bottom of Form

ADF said that “core Christian teachings” were attacked during the district trial in early 2022 and that “finding Räsänen guilty would be a grave violation of human rights, significantly damaging free speech in Finland.”

Tony Perkins, president of one of the U.S.’s leading religious advocacy groups, Family Research Council, also said in a Tuesday tweet that “it is not just Päivi and Bishop Pohjola on trial” but that “the Bible and the ability to live by the word is on trial.”

It's time to pray again for Päivi Räsänen.
After a unanimous acquittal in 2022, Päivi will be on trial this week at the Finnish Court of Appeal. No one should be charged with criminal “hate speech” for simply tweeting a Bible verse.

In her Monday “EWTN News Nightly” interview, Räsänen said her trial directly challenges the rights of Christians to freely express deeply held religious beliefs and that “if something like that could happen in Finland it can happen in any country.”

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