

## **Speech of Lieutenant General Seppo Toivonen, at the Army Commander Change of Command Ceremony in Mikkeli on 31 July 2017**

Honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen, soldiers,

The army is the foundation of Finland's defence system. Its command structure covers our entire country. Using troops required by a given situation, we prevent the occupation of land areas and, with the support of our air and maritime defence, defeat an adversary attacking by land.

The army's structure was refined in our latest defence reform. This enabled the army to focus on its main tasks; preparing Finland's defence and defending our land areas, supporting other authorities and participating in military crisis management. I have had the honour of leading the army for the past three years.

Many significant expectations have been placed on the army. The stability that has characterised Europe for decades has been replaced by a new kind of uncertainty. The change in the security environment, especially the shorter advance warning time and possibility of rapidly developing crises, requires the existence of immediately available national military capabilities.

In addition to traditional military threats, the capacity to respond to more complex threats that combine military and non-military means has become emphasised.

Under my leadership, the army has purposefully developed its activities from trainer of conscripts to true readiness and training organisation. The army's basic readiness personnel, which comprises 4,100 salaried personnel and on average 14,000 conscripts, is an important resource in both disturbances in normal conditions and unexpected changes in the security environment. The army's extended capability rests naturally on our reservists. The activation procedure for using these troops has also been reformed in order for the capability to prevent and repel incidents to be rapidly attainable.

I would like to thank everyone serving in the army for their efforts in furthering our readiness capability. Here, the Army Command deserves special thanks. Under Majors General Jorma Ala-Sankila and Petri Hulkko, it has tirelessly developed new functions and created the necessary prerequisites for multifaceted operations.

Standing in front of us today at this hand-over ceremony, are mainly soldiers serving in the army's readiness formations and new readiness units. The personnel and conscripts serving in these units are a valuable example to us all of strong personal commitment to defending our country. On all of our behalf, thank you!

The army does not work alone, however, but rather as a part of the entire Defence Forces. I would like to thank Defence Command Finland for good steering, and the Navy, Air Force and establishments subordinate to the Defence Command, as well as all of our partners, for your excellent cooperation. To the army, the intensification of cooperation with the Border Guard and the Police has also been of great value.

The result produced by the army is brought about in its brigade-level units, and ensuring their functioning has been a central aim of mine. I am very satisfied with the efforts of the

commanders and staff of our brigade-level units. These efforts have reinforced the functionality of our general conscription.

The increase in the number of conscripts who discontinue their service has been brought under control, and differences between troops have narrowed. Training results are at a good level and the feedback given by conscripts as they muster out has been the best ever measured.

Training methods and exercises have been renewed without prejudice from the point of view of readiness and putting simulators to good use. Experience gained from the participation of Swedish, Norwegian and US troops deployed in Europe in our national exercises has been excellent and further strengthens our belief in our own know-how.

We have come up with functioning, cost-effective solutions for dealing with soon-to-be obsolete army materiel. In the army, we have been able to successfully combine the large spectrum of materiel, the possibilities of our area and experiences gained from our history, the know-how of our professional soldiers and conscripts, as well as the use of different types of troops.

Many of the recent crises around the world bear witness to the fact that ground forces and controlling land areas remains crucial in any conflict. In Finland, the army is being developed in a balanced manner to be able to meet the requirements of its tasks now and in the future.

I am placing the task of commander of the Finnish Army in capable hands. For several years, Major General Petri Hulkko has played an important role in reorganising the army. He possesses extensive experience of different tasks and is a clear and determined leader. Petri, I wish you the best of success in this fine task.

As I now transfer to the reserve, my journey from its beginning as a new recruit in the Karelia Brigade to Commander of the Finnish Army has taken 41 years. I am grateful for all the tasks I have been given.

Before I finish, I would like to mention two important things that I have experienced during these years. The first is the exceptional dedication to their tasks of the Finnish Defence Forces' personnel. Their aim is always to fulfil their duties. This goes for also crisis management operations, which are based on voluntary participation. Even at this moment, more than 500 soldiers are serving in crisis management tasks. It has been an honour to serve within such a community.

The second important thing I have experienced is the real desire of our conscripts, both men liable for military service and female volunteers, to fulfil their obligation and complete their service honourably.

Finally, with great gratitude, I would like to commemorate the sacrifices made by our veteran generation. Without their struggle and post-war rebuilding, Finland would be very different from what it is today. I am certain that the chain of defenders of our independent fatherland will carry on strong also in the future.