

AALTO-yliopiston lukuvuoden avajaiset puhe 1.9.

Students, ladies and gentlemen,

For me, Otaniemi feels like coming home. Tuntuu kuin tulisi kotiin.

It has less to do with geography than with a mindset. When I started studying here a quarter of a century ago, I had a strong feeling that everything was possible. I still feel the same today.

Of course, much has changed since those days. Otaniemi used to be quite isolated — no metro, no tram, just a community of students and researchers driven by the ambition to create, discover, innovate and learn.

To be precise, there was a metro sign next to the bus stop close to the main building. But that was just another teekkari-jäynä — or perhaps a visionary expression about what was yet to come. Either way, we need both: bold ideas and less serious experimentation.

This is what I'm here to talk to you about today.

Ideas are not about whether they succeed or fail. They are about having them in the first place. Many ideas fail, only to give rise to better ones. Many others become reality only long after the person who first formulated them began pursuing them. And some ideas become reality and ultimately shape the world around us.

But ideas need a home.

The basic requirement for an idea to flourish is a society in which people are free: free to think, to question, to experiment — and, yes, free to fail.

Ideas also need competition. The entire practice of science is built on the principle that the better argument should prevail. And this competition is at its best when it crosses borders, disciplines and cultures.

This is, ultimately, what liberal democracy is about: giving people the freedom to shape their own lives and pursue their dreams, while ensuring that everyone plays by the same rules. It means protecting individual freedom while building societies based on equal rights, open markets and the rule of law.

So my message to you is simple: believe in your ideas. You never know where they may take you.

Viestini on yksinkertainen: uskokaan ideoihinne. Ette koskaan tiedä, minne ne voivat viedä.

I invite you to join me in standing up for the principles that make those ideas possible: a free and democratic society, open and competitive markets, and international cooperation.

When I studied here, these principles seemed largely unchallenged. Today, we cannot take them for granted.

And we should not only look to the distant future. Right now, we need to defend the individual's right to choose — not only against authoritarian regimes, but increasingly also against the unintended consequences of technology itself.

Artificial intelligence gives us an extraordinary opportunity to build a world that is more prosperous, peaceful and plentiful. It could amplify human creativity and help us solve problems that today seem almost impossible.

But none of this is guaranteed. Technology will shape the future. The question is whether we will shape the technology.

And this brings me to something I believe is at the heart of Finland's future: human capital.

Finland is a small country. We do not have a huge domestic market. We cannot compete by having more people or more natural resources than others.

Our advantage has been what we can do, how well we can do it — and how successfully we can turn knowledge into value.

That is why the most important investment Finland can make is an investment in its people.

Human capital is not an abstract economic concept. Human capital is the people sitting in this room.

You will create companies. You will develop new technologies. You will become researchers, engineers and entrepreneurs — perhaps even politicians. Some of you will invent things that we cannot yet imagine.

It may sound like a cliché, but it is true: you are the masters of your own future. And your choices will also shape Finland's future.

So go out there. Be curious. Be ambitious. Be brave. Take risks. Fail fast — and try again.

Because success is almost always preceded by attempts that failed.

You never quite know where an idea will take you — unless you give it a chance.

And perhaps that is the most important lesson I learned in Otaniemi: the future does not simply happen to us.

We create it.

Thank you.