

Welcoming words at the planting of the ENO Peace Park on Sept. 21st 2010 in Koli

Dear participants,

There are several good reasons why we have gathered just here today, on this beautiful spot at the foot of the Koli Hill, to plant trees and to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the worldwide ENO – Environment Online – network of primary schools.

This occasion is also connected with the launching of the Koli Cultura –concept, with ambitious plans of developing a service and cultural centre adjacent to the national park, along truly sustainable construction and operation principles.

Koli is not just another hill in the generally flat Finnish terrain. It is the highest hill in southern Finland, and the magnificent scenery that opens from the top of is justly termed *the* national landscape of Finland.

Incidentally, we could also commemorate the anniversary of the successful culmination of the Koli protection campaign, which grew from a local initiative to a nationwide movement, and led to the establishment of Koli National Park twenty years ago. Over 86,000 signatories supported the protection proposal that was formulated by a group of local people in Koli and Lieksa. Suoma and Ilmari Martikainen, who are present here, were central figures in that campaign. During the autumn of 1990, the Finnish government was drafting a bill about the national park, which the parliament, after a hefty debate, approved the following spring.

Without the hugely successful protection campaign, there would certainly be no national park in Koli. At that time there were already massive plans to convert the entire Koli area into a limitlessly expanding skiing resort. Sad examples of such development are to be seen in many places, where free reins have been handed over to the holiday industry.

The heart of Koli was saved by the national park, and the existence of the park has definitely given tune to many activities that have since developed in the entire Koli area and even more broadly. To my mind, both the ten-year old ENO-network and the new Koli Cultura –concept accord fully with the principles of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere –programme, into which Koli itself is also incorporated as part of the North Karelian Biosphere area.

Planting trees is acting locally. Planting trees, today, in Koli, is a splendid opportunity to think globally at the same time. To think about the deep and serious issues of the environment. But also, to enjoy the environment on this particular spot of our beautiful planet.

Welcome!

Heikki Simola

former chairman of the Finnish Association for Nature Conservation