

**Welcome statement (10 min) of  
Minister of Public Administration and Local government  
Ms. Henna Virkkunen**

Leading the Way in eGovernment Development -  
Conference for Government CIOs and Key Officials  
on 29 May 2013,  
Finlandia Hall, Helsinki

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests,

I would like to warmly welcome all of you to Finland and to this conference, which we are very proud to host with the United Nations and the European Commission.

Information and communication technology has become a vital part of governments and public services all over the world. Finland has been using IT in government since the early 1960s. During the first decades, development was fairly slow. Since then, ICT has – as we all know – changed societies and government administrations. ICT is a key element of every government task. Ways of using the latest technology, such as cloud computing, are also being explored.

At the same time, we need to keep in mind that ICT is not an end itself. It is a hired hand – not the master. We need to find ways to use technology in a way that benefits the government and its customers, citizens and business – and all of this, of course, at a reasonable cost.

Public administration in Finland – and I believe this is also the case in other countries – is under pressure. Citizens and business demand better public services. They want more user-friendly electronic services which are useful and practical. They are used to using the latest technology in their private life.

However, at the same time we need to cut back our budgets. We need to do more with less. For example, in Finland, the central government has to cut the IT budget by 10 %, which is about 95 million euros.

One of the basic value which supports us when we are dealing with these pressures is the openness of government. A value, which we feel strongly about in all of the Nordic Countries.

We regard openness as a strength that helps us to modernize government. We need to listen to citizens. We need to listen to businesses. We need to listen to our customers. This is a key way to gain legitimacy for our reforms. In addition to this, customers also provide us better understanding of how and what should be modernized. Listening to customers helps us to focus on the right things in our re-

forms and thus, find the best way to provide benefits for taxpayers with our limited resources.

This is one of the reasons why Finland joined the Global Open Government Partnership (OGP) last April in London. The main theme of our Open Government Partnership Action Plan is citizens' participation. The Action Plan consists of four work areas: 1) Open Procedures, 2) Clear Language 3) Open Knowledge, and 4) Government as an Enabler. The Action Plan was drafted openly with civil society, citizens and civil servants from different government organizations and municipalities. The Action Plan will be implemented soon.

Open knowledge or more familiar open data is part of our Open Government Action Plan. We have opened up a few large data sets, like the Finnish Meteorological Institute's weather information data set and the National Land Survey's topographic data sets. They have already been very popular.

Our next challenge is to make the government documents which contain the decisions of government agencies freely available. A significant share of the decisions are published on the internet, but these are often in document format, which means they cannot be automatically exploited in other services.

(Dear) Leaders of eGovernment,

You hold the key position in our modernization of the government. You have a deep understanding of how to use ICT in the government in the best and most cost-effective way. Experiences differ from country to country, depending on their historical and political background. Some governments have been successful in their ICT policies in some administrative areas while other governments have been successful in other areas. Therefore I think that this conference will be an important way to learn from each other.

Some issues are global, like the balance between openness and data protection. Governments have issued legislation on data protection and privacy. However, huge international companies and players have their own rules on how to handle customer data. Can we protect our citizen's rights? We are trying to tackle this problem in many ways. This is only one example of how this kind of global conference with participants from almost 50 countries can offer a unique forum to exchange views.

I believe that we can learn a lot from each other's experiences, regardless of whether we are from the North or South, or from the East or West. It is important to be open-minded and listen to what others tell us. Back at our offices and homes we may sometimes hear the well-known phrase "Not invented here", which means

that if we have not invented it, it cannot be good for us. However, I am sure you do not follow this philosophy, otherwise you would not be here.

So, I would like to wish you a successful conference and an enjoyable stay in Helsinki and Finland.