

## **The Ebbe Munck Award, speech by recipient Aviâja Egede Lynge. Christiansborg Palace, November 14, 2023**

Your Majesty, the Board of the Ebbe Munck Memorial Fund, my family, friends, colleagues and all of you who are here today.

Your Majesty, the Board of the Ebbe Munck Memorial Fund, it is with great honor that I receive the Ebbe Munck Honorary Award today, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

The last couple of months, where I have familiarized myself with who Ebbe Munck really was, has been an exciting journey. Ebbe Munck had some character traits that I particularly recognize in myself: curiosity, the desire for justice and equality, his ethical outlook on life and, not least, his humanity and ability to meet and understand people.

It is thus humanity, seeing and understanding people, but also justice and equality that my speech today will be about.

The desire for and attitudes towards freedom, justice and equality is something that I grew up with as the most common thing. King, grandma and grandpa's dog were named after Martin Luther King. Grandma was ethnically Danish and Grandpa was mixed and descended from the Lynge family up in Vendsyssel and the large Lynge family from Nuuk.

In 1932, my grandfather, aataa Kunuk, was born. Augo Lynge, his father and thus my great-grandfather, was a close friend of Knud Rasmussen. When my grandfather was to be baptized in Store Magle Parish, Knud Rasmussen, who was to be the godfather, insisted that my grandfather be called Kunuk, which is an Inuit name. Little Knud, Kununnguaq would have preferred to be called Kunuk himself.

My great-grandfather Augo Lynge, who became one of Greenland's first two members of parliament in 1953, wanted equality based on a relationship of trust between Greenland and Denmark. From his diaries, we in the family know that he wanted full Greenlandic equality without us having to give up who we are, linguistically and culturally. The point is that much of my outlook on life comes from my father, which he got from his father Kunuk, who in turn got his from his father Augo. Trust and respect between people and the right to equality based on one's own culture are the basic values that I come from.

I grew up in the 1970s in the run-up to Home Rule. My father and mother were part of the movement that wanted equality, equal rights and greater self-determination. As a little girl, I attended Aasivik, the summer rallies where people gathered to debate, revive our culture and set goals for action. I sat, often at the side of the stage alone, listening to the speeches being made. I didn't realize that these attitudes were considered rebellious in the 1970s. For me, it became the most normal thing in the world that it is okay to have your own opinion, and the most natural thing must be to fight for equality and justice. To this day, I still find it a little strange when I am described as brave. Because to me, it's just a natural thing - something you do. My father is the person who has influenced me the most in my life. I was left alone with him when I was 6 years old. Every single night, he read to me. He didn't have much money, so he had to take the books he had access to. So he used, among other things, his textbooks from the teacher training college. By the age of 7, I knew the entire food chain in biology. Every day, after work, he took me cross-country skiing on one leg. My dad is the one who taught me that you never give up. No matter how hard and painful it may be. If you have a goal, you reach it. And if you fall, you just get back up. When I was a young girl, he said to me: "You have to remember three things: You are small in physique, you are a woman and you are Greenlandic". And I have certainly had to understand that in many situations. Some people's tendency to undermine and control

certain people is a funny thing. Many of them have had to learn that I only become strong when they try to undermine me.

As a child of the time before the Home Rule, I learned from the spirit of the times that education was the way forward. I could only speak Greenlandic as a child. Through my Danish grandmother I learned my first Danish. The first things I could say were also naughty songs from wartime Denmark. You won't hear those today. I graduated as a Social Anthropologist from The Edinburgh University in 2001. After many years of struggling to become what my country needed, I came home to Greenland. I was proud and thought I knew everything. But then my father said some words that would change me and that have since set the path for the way I work. He said: "Now you have to unlearn".

There I had spent my whole life trying to become something for my country, and what did he mean by unlearning me? The answer lay in the fact that I had become a European and perfect product who knew the theories. I didn't yet know my people, their truth, their way of thinking and how to treat them with equality and appreciation. Fortunately, I was able to complete the necessary unlearning, and today I see the person when I see and meet him or her.

Since we all know HC Andersen's fairy tale about The Little Match Girl, I will initially allow myself to use this nice little fairy tale to create the framework for my story - about my work as a Spokesperson for Children. When the little girl with the matchsticks is found on New Year's morning, no one knows anything about what happened on New Year's Eve when she slowly but surely froze to death out in the cold night. Every time the little girl struck a matchstick to warm herself, the flame would light up and show her something she could use.

And that is the foundation for my work as a Spokesperson for Children. 2 months after I became the Spokesperson for Children, I went on my first trip to see, hear and understand how the children and their families were doing. It was a trip to Northern Greenland. I traveled by boat with my colleague Ellen Bang Bourup to 17 towns and settlements. We quickly realized that we had to adapt our way of being to the norms and informal culture of the small North Greenlandic communities if we were to gain the knowledge we wanted. Namely, their truth. And we got it. Never had I imagined that the truth would be so harsh. That there were so many dark numbers that were not registered. That some conversations had to take place in the mountains, secretly, because the fear of being caught telling the truth was so great. These children and families had never before been asked how they were doing. They were used to politicians coming to town hall meetings, telling them about their own plans and then they left again. And those came to the meetings were always the ones who had the informal power in the small communities.

When we got back on the boat, we sometimes had to cry. Because the children's reality was so harsh. We witnessed a triple betrayal: - from the family, - from the system, but especially from the public and the society. The stories of sexual abuse, the adults protecting each other and not the children, the inequality, the poverty, the powerlessness and the attempt to normalize harmful behaviour. Once people realized that we meet them where they are, listen to them, and protect our sources anonymously, then people were suddenly lining up. To tell. That is the truth that we saw and heard, we saw with our own eyes how the children were doing, under what conditions they lived, and it was the children themselves who told us how they felt.

Then I brought this truth to the politicians and the rest of public Greenland. Never had I imagined the outcry of opposition that came. Among the reactions were accusations of us lying. That children could not say such things and that our knowledge was not valid. I experienced personal attacks and attempts at character assassination, and the Danish Parliament debated whether the Self-Government should be allowed to continue to run the Social Area. We two little women had pulled the rug out from underneath the informal power structure, which was primarily maintained by men.

In the fairytale of The Little Match Girl, she was just a little girl who had no one to turn to, who lacked warmth and security. And who had to sell matchsticks to survive at home. On our travels throughout Greenland, we realized more and more that no one has ever really known enough about the children's conditions, and in fact, few people knew anything about how the children themselves experienced it themselves. HC Andersen managed to touch us deeply in our hearts with his fairy tale about The Little Match Girl. Statistically, it was only 1 little girl. Here we were, with hundreds of children whose conditions and reality surpassed anything we could ever imagine. Can I ask you, what do we need statistics for when the children have already told us how they feel?

When we visited these places where no one had ever listened to the voices of children, and a little girl asked me:

*Can you take me with you when you leave?*

That's when it really dawned on me that children are also human beings, just like everyone else, in need of security and warmth. Just like The Little Match Girl. Unfortunately, I couldn't take her with me.

In Greenland we have a saying: "Mikisut nalunartunuku" - "Never underestimate the little ones". The resistance we encountered gave us the strength and power to fight even harder for the children. When you have talked to the children yourself, seen their tears of pain, seen the powerlessness and fear in their eyes, and how they react when someone listens to them and believes what they say is true for the first time, it is one of the most provocative and painful things to be told that their voices are lying. So the resistance became a motivation to work even harder for the truth so that these children could start getting the help they deserve. Ellen, Team MIO, I am forever grateful to you for this journey we have made for the sake of the children.

Fast forward to today, and a lot has happened. Since then, Ellen and I have traveled to 40 places in Greenland. And today, everyone wants to talk about it. No one denies The Little Match Girl anymore. The truth about the children is no longer frowned upon. Today it has become quite normal, even in wider circles in the population and in the media, you can talk about the children's conditions without denying it.

And today, I find a lot of gratitude, rather than resistance, in the population. I am grateful for all those who have had and have the courage to follow me. Processes and change take time. And one of the biggest moments for me happened recently. All the village chairmen from all the municipalities in Greenland approached me together. They now want to stop sexual abuse in the settlements and want to work together.

The most important value that has carried the soul of our work for children is "Inuppalaassuseq" - humanity. It is the foundation of our view of children and human beings. Inuppalaassuseq cannot be translated directly, but the word humanity fits the context well. The word comes from Inuk, a human being. Inuppalaassuseq is "to be like a human". In the word, there are many meanings. These include being down to earth, present, respectful, understanding, appreciative and having an equal approach to your fellow human beings. But there are also deep remnants of an original hunter society where every single person was needed in the small collective units. The importance of the individual to the community therefore also included "being a good person".

Ebbe Munck wanted to understand and see with his own eyes and had the humanity - Inuppalaassuseq - that allowed him to get along with all kinds of people and open up opportunities for action. It was also the humanity - inuppalaassuseq - that His Royal Highness, Crown Prince Frederik, found in Qaanaaq. To be seen as a human being.

It takes courage to dare to go new ways. To dare to change your view of humanity. That is what we need. Your Majesty, the people of Greenland love you very much. I would therefore like to humbly ask them to take

the lead in opening up for more inuppalaassuseq - humanity between Greenland and Denmark. Greenland needs recognition and understanding so that we can begin to heal history together.

The Little Match Girl taught us many things on the last night of her life. Striking a single match is just a moment of light and warmth, and she realized that too. That's why she finally lit them all at once. She got some light and warmth, but eventually had to burn them all in one go. We can only hope that the little fairy tale about The Little Match Girl as well as our many articulations about children's conditions in Greenland will bring out the light and warmth that children need so much.

Therefore, it is an honor for me that Karina Møller will sing a song today about how we often have to go through the darkness to see the light.

Qujanaq. Thank you.