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Statement by

H.E. Mr. Valdis Zatlers
President of the Republic of Latvia

at

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United Nations, New York
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Mr. President, Excellencies,

Allow me at the outset, Mr. Deiss, to congratulate you on assuming the post of President of the current session of the General Assembly. Your Excellency, I pledge you Latvia's full support.

Sixty-five years ago the United Nations was created on the ashes of the bloodiest war in the history of mankind as an international forum where all nations meet as equals, willing to address international challenges and to prevent the scourge of war. Since then it has become the most broadly represented body of nations focused on promoting security, peace and prosperity all over the world.

This year also marks the 20th anniversary of Latvia's regained freedom after fifty years of Soviet occupation, oppression and injustice. Latvia's story shows that the values enshrined in the Charter are universal and with persistence and common vision of the people they come alive. Even if it demands decades.

It also shows that it is possible to overcome even the deepest of divisions. It shows that, while honoring our history, we can extend a hand of cooperation and look into the future with hope.

Mr. President,

There are many global issues that need our real attention and require urgent action. Just a few days ago we renewed our commitment to development at the High Level Plenary Meeting on Millennium Development Goals.

While important improvements have been made globally, progress towards achieving the MDGs by 2015 has not been sufficient. If we are serious about achieving the Millennium Development Goals, we need to show commitment and action.

Mr. President,

New consciousness is emerging from the awareness of the negative impact of climate change. Climate change is a fact. We witness a rising number of storms, excessive rainfalls and untypical temperatures which lead to flooding, forest fires and crop failures.

All these disasters have an immense material cost and claim lives of people; therefore, they should be treated as a serious security threat. The response must be twofold. We have to adapt to the changes already in place and those which we will face in the coming decades. And most importantly, we have to work on preventive measures like reduction of emissions.

We have a road ahead of us on the issue of climate change and every country has to contribute if our actions on climate change were to be successful. Within the framework of the Copenhagen Accord, Latvia, among other EU Member States, is providing assistance that alongside financial contributions by other key players helps the developing countries fighting climate change. We must make the next step in Cancun. It is necessary to agree on global action to address the climate change. The future of next generations is at stake.

While we work for the long-term goals, we also have to address the immediate crisis wherever it occurs. The international community with the UN in the leading role has been addressing humanitarian needs following the most devastating flooding in Pakistan that affected more than fourteen million people. This year we also witnessed one of the most terrible earthquakes in Haiti.

Latvia despite its economic challenges was able to respond to international emergency and humanitarian needs, both through the UN Central Emergency Response Fund and through additional pledge of 150 000 EUR for Haiti recovery. Latvia will continue to help countries affected by tragic disasters.

Mr. President,

Latvia has always supported strengthening of the United Nations as the only truly global international organization. However, in the time of globalization and rapid development, necessity for reforms is an inevitable reality. Therefore we must continuously look for maximum effectiveness and efficiency in the work of the UN in order to deliver results worthy of this organization.

A UN Security Council that reflects the realities of the twenty first century would be a significant step towards a more effective United Nations organization. We truly hope for a faster pace of the reform process.

We commend the work of the UN in the promotion of gender equality and welcome the creation of a unified gender entity. I would like to congratulate the new head of United Nations WOMEN - the former Chilean President Ms Michelle Bachelet – with the appointment and wish her the best success in this highly important post.

This fall we also mark the 10th anniversary of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. We see it as an opportunity to review the implementation of the resolution with a view of identifying the best practices and challenges, particularly, regarding equal participation of women in decision-making and eradication of all types of gender-based violence, especially in conflict situations.

Mr. President,

In this session we have a very important task ahead of us. Review of work of the Human Rights Council. The Council has already shown capability to address many human rights situations and to advance human rights. I would particularly like to highlight the independent work of the Special Procedures and the establishment of the Universal Periodic Review mechanism. However, improvements are still necessary.

I am confident that with good will, with the participation and input from all of us the review process will lead to a strengthened institution, with increased credibility and greater impact on the improvement of human rights.

Latvia has always placed promotion of human rights among its top priorities. Therefore Latvia has put forward its candidacy for the Human Rights Council for the year 2014.

Mr. President,

The UN's role in maintaining international peace and security is irreplaceable. We must continue to work with all the means at our disposal to create a more stable world.

Latvia appreciates the positive momentum that was created at the Non-proliferation Treaty Review Conference earlier this year. Stabilizing and strengthening of nuclear non-proliferation regime is a shared responsibility of all the UN members. Latvia as a member of the international community expresses its hope that every diplomatic opportunity will be used to find a comprehensive long-term solution to the Iranian and North Korean nuclear issues.

The New START Treaty between the United States and Russian Federation sets a powerful and remarkable example of real steps to reduce the threat of strategic arms and engage other powers in fulfilling the goals of the NPT.

Latvia firmly supports the nuclear security discussion initiated by President Obama. Promising signs on the international agenda have positively influenced the security of Europe and fostered the debate on conventional regime in Europe. The ambitious road map is in front of us and we all together should move forward and strengthen security all over the world.

Mr. President,

Stability and security in a number of regions in the world remains on the international agenda. In the Middle East, international community has to encourage the parties to move towards real compromises leading to a comprehensive settlement of the conflict. Common efforts of the international community, including the Quartet, and the unity of the Arab states are decisive in ensuring continuation of the Peace Process with the very clear final aim of establishing an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace with the State of Israel.

We welcome the launch of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and commend all involved partners for their efforts. Sustainable and durable solutions for Gaza, Palestinian reconciliation, as well as extension of the settlement moratorium are crucial for the Palestinian State building process.

We sincerely hope that these talks will continue in a constructive manner and supplemented by negotiations on Israeli-Syria and Israeli-Lebanon tracks will lead towards comprehensive peace and stability in the Middle East.

Mr. President,

A week ago people of Afghanistan voted for their new parliament. The elections showed that the Afghanis are determined to build a peaceful and prosperous country that is in peace with its neighbors. We should commend the work done by the Independent Election Commission.

The elections were conducted in a hard security and political environment. It is of the highest importance that the Government of Afghanistan corrects the irregularities caused by the harsh environment.

The international community plays a substantial role in coordinating civilian efforts in Afghanistan.

The work of the Secretary-General's Special Representative needs to be commended. The recently released 2010 Mid-Year Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict is worrisome and shows how much work remains to be done in order to improve the situation.

In order to be successful in Afghanistan, one should not forget the regional aspect of the issue. The stability in Central Asia is an important factor in succeeding in Afghanistan.

We are satisfied to see that the Kabul process is underway and the government of Afghanistan is resolute to act in order to regain the trust of the Afghan people and to align the support of international community behind the goals of national development. A well coordinated effort is necessary to follow through the Kabul commitments so that in 2014 the Government of Afghanistan would be able to take full responsibility for the governance of the country.

Therefore Latvia is putting more emphasis on training Afghan security forces, both army and police. In June Latvia carried out a training project for Afghan police officers in the field of criminal investigation.

Another important task is fostering economic and social development of Afghanistan. Regional cooperation can be very useful in this effort, especially regarding energy and transport infrastructure. Latvia sees multiple transport corridors in future connecting Afghanistan to the neighboring region, as well as to Europe.

Mr. President,

I would like to refer to the European Union as an important partner of the UN. The United Nations and the European Union share the same fundamental values – freedom, democracy, rule of law, human rights, equality and tolerance. It is our duty to work together to make sure that these are not just words but something to be enjoyed daily by everybody.

The European Union has changed through the Lisbon Treaty. We hope that this change will give the European Union clearer voice in relations with our partners, including the UN. I hope that agreement will be soon reached to ensure effective participation of the EU in the work of the General Assembly.

Mr. President,

Finally, I would like to touch upon the economic slowdown that the global economy has encountered during the last couple of years. Latvia was one of the countries hit hardest by the crisis.

Now Latvia's economy shows signs of recovery. We are seeing positive trends of macroeconomic indicators since the beginning of the year. We are on the way up.

The reason of our recovery is the tough fiscal adjustment that Latvia has showed already since 2008. I am certain that there will be other countries that will need to go through a considerable budgetary consolidation soon. Our experience shows: it is possible, but only with full understanding support of population.

Latvia has experienced large-scale reforms and we are ready to share our experience. This is one of the reasons why Latvia has put forward its candidature in this year's elections to the ECOSOC.

Mr. President,

Prudence will be a key element in preventing future economic crisis from arising, but not the only one. Global financial governance will be one of such elements. Latvia commends the role and leadership that has been shown by G20 countries. Financial governance should be global and we highly value the initiatives towards this end put forward by G20, international financial institutions and other fora.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world enters the second decade of the twenty first century. There are challenges to security, peace and prosperity. They can only be met by a common effort and unity of mankind.

I wish us all the wisdom and courage to maintain the higher interest in the common good. Latvia looks forward to a fruitful 65th session of the General Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. President!