

Statement of H.E. Mr. Andris Bērziņš,

President of Latvia,

at the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly

(New York, 25 September 2014)

Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

As we enter a crucial session of the General Assembly, we will define our post-2015 direction. Our way ahead must be based on the triangle of security, development, and human rights. If one of these elements is not advanced, then the other two will fail.

Mr. President,

This year we commemorated the grim anniversaries of the First and Second World wars. Both wars began in Europe but quickly spread throughout the world destroying the lives of countless millions. The League of Nations and the United Nations were built on the ashes of these wars.

Today again, global security and peace is challenged by forces willing to rewrite the history and rules of the international order.

The aggression of Russia against **Ukraine** has defied the basic principles of the United Nations, uprooting the very foundation of the international system.

It has grabbed a part of a sovereign European country using previously unseen tactics of warfare and immense propaganda against its neighbor. It enabled the tragic shooting down of a civilian airplane. It has shown that agreements and commitments do not matter, and it wantonly ignores and manipulates international opinion. These actions can only be qualified as a threat to global peace and security.

The world, including the UN General Assembly, has supported Ukraine's territorial integrity. The illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by Russia is condemned and will not be recognized by the international community.

Russia has a vital role in security and stability in Europe and should be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Latvia hopes that the ceasefire agreed on the 5th September will be implemented in a genuine and sustainable manner. Latvia calls on Russia to immediately withdraw its armed forces from Ukrainian territory and to stop sending weapons and mercenaries to the terrorist groups. We call upon Russia to return to respect its international commitments and uphold international law.

Mr. President,

75 years ago, the decay of the international system already proved fatal for the Baltic States.

Two totalitarian regimes – those of Hitler and of Stalin - divided Europe and we lost our freedom for 50 long years.

25 years ago, more than 2 million people joined hands and formed a human chain across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The Baltic Way clearly illustrated the people's demand for freedom and restoration of their statehood. The Baltic people made their choice. The Ukrainian people have the same right to choose their own democratic path, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Latvia supports the complementarity of efforts among international organizations at a global and regional level to use all instruments at their disposal:

- to prevent the emergence of “frozen conflict” in the Eastern regions of Ukraine;
- to help and support Ukraine;
- to uphold international instruments, agreements, commitments, and demand their fulfilment by all parties, including Russia;
- to maintain unity, and to reject attempts to divide Ukraine by reviving spheres of influence and to establish hidden support to terrorists as a new norm of Europe.

There is no alternative to an international order, based on the rule of law, democracy and respect for human rights, that would provide the basis for long lasting peace and security.

Mr. President,

Resolution of **protracted conflicts** in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh should remain high on the international agenda.

In addition, the security situation in the wider Middle East is very fragile. A solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is paramount in order to establish lasting stability in the region.

Following the escalation of violence in the past months, the international community, including Latvia, has helped to address emergency humanitarian needs of the people of **Gaza**. We hope the current ceasefire will be fully respected by both sides.

However, only an agreement on a two-state solution, achieved through direct negotiations, will accomplish these goals.

We welcome the elimination of **Syrian** chemical weapons and related materials. While easing of continuous human suffering of Syrians is the immediate goal, the international community must continue political efforts to find a solution to this horrific conflict. Those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria must be held accountable by the International Criminal Court.

The limited ability of the UN Security Council to address the urgent situations in Syria and Ukraine in a timely manner underlines the need to move forward with the **reform of the Council**.

Latvia supports expansion of the Security Council in both categories of membership. At the same time, the French initiative, aimed at restricting the use of the veto, merits our joint attention.

Completion of the ISAF mission in **Afghanistan** this year will be an important step for its people on their way towards full responsibility for peace and stability in the country. Despite all the challenges, the legacy of the mission is clear: there is more peace, more security, more human rights and more opportunities for the Afghan people than ever. The recent presidential elections clearly showed the will of the Afghan people to live in a peaceful and democratic society. The people of Afghanistan will not stay alone after 2014.

International support to Afghanistan, including in the field of security, will be continued. I am convinced that cooperation and confidence-building between Afghanistan and its neighbors, including in Central Asia, will be a key factor for long-term security solutions in the region.

Growing negative impact of **violent extremist ideologies in Syria, Iraq** and other countries is alarming. The militant fighters of the Islamic State have exploited the instability in these countries and now pose a threat to ethnic and religious communities. In this context, Latvia joined the US coordinated efforts by the international community in countering ISIL. We strongly welcome the adoption of Security Council Resolution on foreign fighters. Latvia has already started to prepare measures to prevent recruitment and support to foreign fighters.

Latvia is concerned about the **safety of journalists** during political unrest and conflicts. All imprisoned journalists must be released. Free media and access to information, including online, are essential components of any democracy.

Armed conflicts in Africa have an impact upon the stability and sustainable development of its people. Latvia is taking part in peace and security operations in Mali and the Central African Republic to contribute to conflict settlement and to improve the security situation in those regions.

Latvia is ready to commit itself to strengthen United Nations global peacekeeping.

Latvia welcomes the ongoing dialogue between the E3+3 countries and **Iran** which aims to negotiate a comprehensive agreement on Iran's nuclear program. The involved parties, first of all Iran, must make every effort to use the extended time frame to find a solution.

We must work towards revitalizing the global **disarmament** and nonproliferation agenda. Success of the 2015 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty Review Conference next year depends on re-establishing trust and common purpose among states parties. Latvia was one of the first states to sign and ratify the Arms Trade Treaty. We urge all UN members to do so.

Peace and security are both enablers of sustainable development and objectives in their own right. Without peaceful societies we can not achieve **sustainable development**. Each country has its own responsibility for achieving that goal. Our societies need honest and accountable governments who protect them from violence and crime and ensure fundamental freedoms and sustainable economic growth.

14 years ago, we, the Member States of the United Nations, made a historic commitment to eradicate extreme poverty and improve the health and welfare of the world's people within fifteen years. The new development agenda should go further. We must address global challenges such as conflicts, terrorism, inequalities, lack of rule of law, climate change and natural disasters.

Social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability should be addressed in a balanced way. I thank the Secretary-General for his personal engagement in bringing together the representatives of governments, business, industry, finance, and civil society to discuss **climate change** this week. Latvia wholeheartedly supports the initiatives of the Secretary General.

The post-2015 agenda must be consistent with all **human rights** and underpinned by the rule of law. It should address inequalities and discrimination, including by means of the advancement of information and communication technologies. They are key enablers for all spheres of development. Gender equality is essential in shaping respectful and equal relationships in society. These values are important for Latvia.

We will continue to promote them globally as an aspiring member of the Human Rights Council for the term 2015-2017.

Last but not least, the post-2015 agenda should be built on strong accountability mechanisms and strengthened global partnership. It needs an active engagement of governments, civil society, private sector and the United Nation system. Latvia is looking forward to the synthesis report by the Secretary-General and intergovernmental negotiations to culminate in the 2015 Summit.

In the first half of 2015 Latvia will assume the **Presidency of the Council of the European Union**. Europe needs the world as much as the world needs Europe. That is why the Latvian Presidency will focus on strengthening the European Union's involvement globally. We will actively work to promote Europe's cooperation with its neighbors and with the countries of Central Asia.

Mister President,

I assure you of my country's commitment to actively engage in efforts to shape our common future.

Thank you.