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Statement by

H.E. Mr. Andris Bērziņš
President of the Republic of Latvia

at

the High Level Meeting of the 67th Session of the
General Assembly on the Rule of Law

United Nations, New York
24 September 2012

Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Latvia aligns itself with the statement made by the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso on behalf of the European Union.

Latvia is strongly committed to strengthening rule of law, democracy, human rights and good governance around the world.

Our commitment is based on our own experience: more than 70 years ago Latvia and the other two Baltic States were eliminated from the world political map because of the collapse of a rules-based international system. Two totalitarian regimes – the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany - divided Europe, violating international law and ignoring the sovereign will of free countries.

Latvia restored its independence only twenty-one years ago. From a Soviet-occupied country, Latvia re-emerged as a reliable member of the international system – the UN, the European Union and NATO. From a closed and regulated system, we have developed an open, liberal, fast growing market economy. A totalitarian regime with

oppressed people has been replaced by stable democratic institutions and an open society where human rights are respected.

The key to Latvia's success has been establishing the principles of justice, rule of law, democracy; and putting them into practice.

We follow those principles also in our international relations, and contribute to strengthening the rule of law in the world. For example, Latvia is assisting Georgia to set up an effective system of supervision over financing of political parties and electoral campaigns, and Latvia is helping Moldova to reform its justice sector.

Mr. President,

Our history proves that a strong multilateral, inclusive, rules-based international order is essential for maintaining global peace and security. The United Nations plays an important role in this, as its Member States have committed to implement principles contained in the UN Charter.

We believe that a comprehensive approach in addressing rule-of-law issues is needed. International commitments, national implementation,

monitoring, better co-operation and coordination among international actors in assisting states can contribute to the worldwide respect for the rule of law.

Voluntarily pledges made by Member States on the occasion of this meeting are the first concrete steps in reaffirming our political commitment to the rule of law and moving the agenda forward. In this context and at this point, Latvia now makes the following pledges:

First, to provide assistance to other countries in the field of justice sector reform and the strengthening of the rule of law;

Second, in order to improve access to justice by reducing and balancing the workload of courts, the Republic of Latvia will gradually introduce mediation by the year 2015, thereby facilitating out-of-court dispute resolution where appropriate.

Third, Latvia will be taking firm steps to join the Joint Action for Free Expression on the Internet “Freedom Online” within one year as Latvia strongly supports rights to freedom of expression and

freedom of the media, and their application to the Internet and other networked technologies.

Mr. President,

Latvia also stands committed to gender equality, promotion of women's rights and participation and inclusion of women in governmental and political processes. Stopping violence against women and preventing discrimination, as well as addressing women's justice and security concerns around the world is part of strengthening the international rule of law.

The International Criminal Court is the only permanent international court entrusted to prosecute the gravest crimes against humanity. It plays an important role in closing the accountability gap, and in promoting international justice, peace and security. As a long term supporter of the ICC, Latvia believes that the Court should receive the full cooperation and support by UN Member States.

Mr. President, Let me wish you and all of us an effective and comprehensive follow-up of this high-level event and its presence in the future agenda of the United Nations.

Thank you, Mr President.