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Statement by

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

at

the 66th Session of the General Assembly

United Nations, New York
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Mr President, Excellences, ladies and gentlemen!

Allow me at the outset, Mr Al-Nasser, to congratulate you on assuming the post of the President of the 66th session of the General Assembly. Your Excellency, I assure you of the fullest cooperation of the Latvian delegation.

Mr Secretary General, I congratulate you on your re-election to this honourable post for the second term. I wish you all the success and strength in guiding the organization and the Secretariat in all their complex tasks.

I warmly welcome the state of South Sudan as the 193rd member of the United Nations.

Mr President,

Latvia has always supported strengthening the United Nations as the only truly global, universal international organization. However, the UN must change and adapt to the new realities in order to deliver the best results and sustain its influence. The revitalisation of the General Assembly and the reforming of other principal organs is essential for the UN in order to keep pace with the modern realities in the world and to make the whole work of the UN more effective.

This will allow consistent adherence to the principles of sound budgetary discipline and a fair distribution of expenses among the Member States. In the context of the global economic slowdown, we welcome the initiative of the Secretary General to cut the UN budget for 2012-2013 by 3 per cent, and we look forward to a constructive discussion on this matter.

The reform of the UN Security Council is long overdue. We call on all partners to work sincerely on this important issue. Latvia is ready to assume greater international responsibility and is planning to engage more actively in the work of the UN Security Council by putting forward its candidature for the non-permanent seat.

Mr President,

This year marks the 20th anniversary since Latvia joined the United Nations after regaining independence. In these twenty years we have undergone a complete transformation – from a Soviet occupied European country with no trace on the political map, Latvia has re-emerged as a country with stable democratic institutions, a member of the UN, the EU and NATO. From a closed regulated system we have developed an open, liberal market economy. From a totalitarian regime we have grown as a democratic society where the rule of law and human rights are respected. Now we are able to share our transformation experience by helping other countries in their own development.

Mr President,

Important changes have started in North Africa and the Middle East – often called the Arab Spring. People have gone to the streets demanding democratic reforms and influence on the future development of their countries. The international community has to support these aspirations and assist in building stable and trusted democratic institutions and establishing the rule of law.

We welcome the timely reaction of the UN to the events in Libya, such as the decisions of the UN Security Council to provide humanitarian and security assistance, as well as the referral of the case to the International Criminal Court. Latvia has recognized the National Transitional Council of Libya and supported the decision of the General Assembly to allow it to represent Libya at this session. Joint action is crucial and we hope that the UN, with relevant regional involvement, will continue to play its leading role in Libya.

We support the UN Security Council presidential statement regarding the events in Syria and the Human Rights Council decision to dispatch urgently a special mission to Syria. The message is clear – violations of human rights and the use of force against civilians is totally unacceptable and strongly condemned by the international community. We look forward to an appropriate follow-up on this issue in the Security Council.

Today international community has a historic responsibility to make the Middle East a safer, more prosperous and more democratic place to live. We must support the Middle East Peace Process with an aim of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

Latvia strongly encourages both sides to resume dialogue without delay. Sustainable peace is possible only if the Israelis and the Palestinians reach an agreement that takes into account legitimate interests of both sides. The international community, the UN, the Middle East Quartet, the Arab League and others, should act together to help both sides to return to the negotiation table.

Mr President,

Turning to sustainable development, I would like to stress that we have responsibility to future generations for the preservation of the natural environment in the world. This responsibility includes an obligation to ensure that resources, available to us now, are used in the most appropriate ways.

In order to address the challenges induced by climate change joint global action is needed with regard to emissions reduction and adaptation to global warming. The next UN Climate Conference in Durban will take important decisions later this year. The agreement on Climate Change Action should be a reasonable compromise that is acceptable for the majority of participating parties and does not exclude any of the major economies.

In order to achieve sustainable development the protection of the environment as well as the preservation of a healthy society are most important. However, in the 21st century we face a new challenge - non-communicable diseases. We commend the High-level Meeting on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases and the adoption of the Political Declaration. We hope that we will have an effective follow-up process.

Mr President,

The economic crisis has reminded us that we live in an interdependent world. We are deeply worried by the level of uncertainty and volatility in the international trade and financial markets. The primary responsibility for prudent governance is at a national level. However, in the current situation the international community must, once again, act together and find sustainable stabilization measures in order to prevent another downturn in the global economy.

My country, Latvia, was one of those hit first and hard by the crisis, but now is among the countries that are steadily recovering. Our GDP is growing again, and unemployment falling. The recovery of the Latvian economy can teach us several simple lessons. Firstly, the importance of acting quickly and decisively in adopting austerity measures. Secondly, to carry out structural reforms, there is a strong need to communicate and to engage with society. Finally, of course, the value of international solidarity.

Mr President,

We face a large number of transnational threats, including terrorism. This year we commemorate 10 years after the tragic terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. We express our solidarity and sympathy with the victims of "Nine Eleven" and others who have been affected by terrorism all over the world.

As we combat terrorism, we must also analyse its root causes. Our aim in Afghanistan is to help to stabilize the security situation, and to build local democratic institutions. This will empower the Afghan Government to take over responsibility for security throughout the country by 2014. A sustainable solution in Afghanistan can only be found if regional

actors, including Central Asian countries, are part of the process. Joint action is needed to unlock economic opportunities, in strengthen regional security co-operation, to develop infrastructure and transport corridors to connect Afghanistan with the region and the rest of the world.

Mr President,

In addition to the role of the UN in maintaining the international peace and security, the importance of regional organizations is increasing. In this context we attach particular attention to the protracted conflicts in Europe - in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Regional organizations, in this case the EU and the OSCE, must continue working to seek peaceful solutions. Good cooperation with the UN is crucial.

Let me emphasize in this regard the principled and consistent position of Latvia and the EU in supporting the peaceful settlement of conflicts and values such as democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights. These lie at the core of the EU foreign policy strategy.

Mr President,

This year we had had the review process of the functioning of the main UN human rights body – the Human Rights Council. Latvia saw this review process as a unique opportunity to improve the performance and credibility of this important body. We took note of the outcome of the review process, however we believe that much more could have been done to enable the Council to live up to the expectations that the countries and people had placed upon it.

Latvia believes that the members of the Human Rights Council must lead by example through full commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. Latvia attaches the greatest importance to this commitment by putting forward its candidacy for the Human Rights Council elections in the year 2014.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Challenges to global security, development and human rights can only be overcome by our joint efforts. Latvia looks forward to a fruitful 66th session of the General Assembly.

Thank you, Mr President!