

**Statement of H.E. Mr Andris Bērziņš, the President of Latvia,
at the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly
(24 September 2013)**

Mr President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen!

[Allow me, Mr Ashe, to wish you a fruitful term as the President of the 68th Session of the General Assembly.]¹

The three pillars of the UN – peace and security, sustainable development and human rights – are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. Respect for universal human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, is a cornerstone of international peace and stability.

¹ Nesaka, ja UNGA prezidents nav telpā.

Fragile, conflict-affected and least developed countries face the biggest difficulties ensuring sustainable development. Growing evidence shows that progress on Millenium Development Goals in these states is impossible without first achieving peace and security. This leads us to one of the cornerstones of the new Post-2015 vision: peace and security are basic conditions for a decent life and for the enjoyment of human rights.

The priorities of this session are topical and very pertinent. The new development framework of post-2015 will remain high on the UN agenda for the following two years and beyond. It should set out a comprehensive and coherent framework around a single set of global goals, driving action in all countries.

A set of peace-building goals should be high on the post-2015 agenda, where the UN should continue to play the leading role in promoting settlement of disputes by peaceful means.

The Wider Middle East stands at the crossroads. Events there have global impact and the international community must take decisive action.

We deplore the continuing humanitarian catastrophe in Syria. Easing of human suffering is the immediate goal, and we commend international efforts to this end. Especially I would like to thank the neighbouring countries for hosting the Syrian refugees.

The detailed report by the UN inspectors confirms the use of chemical weapons against civilians on August 21st. Those who committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria must face the International Criminal Court.

The agreement reached by the United States and Russia on the framework to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons should be reflected in a UN Security Council resolution, with a clear indication that the Chapter Seven of the UN Charter would be invoked in case of non-compliance.

We encourage the new Iranian leadership to address the concerns of the international community. We welcome the new Iranian government's stated determination to resolve the nuclear issue, thus building confidence in the peaceful nature of its nuclear program.

Latvia welcomes the re-opening of the direct Middle East peace negotiations. Latvia praises the role of United States as the mediator. Negotiations should demonstrate the commitment of both parties to a peaceful settlement. We anticipate a two state solution – Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Latvia is convinced that the resolution of protracted conflicts in Moldova, Georgia as well as Nagorno-Karabakh should remain high on the international agenda. Efforts to achieve conflict resolution should be increased.

Mr. President,

Latvia has accumulated extensive experience during its transition to a free, just and democratic society. As an EU Member state with extensive experience, we share it with partners in the countries of EU Eastern Partnership and Central Asia. Latvia does and will continue to offer its expertise in such areas as rule of law and fundamental freedoms, thus contributing to good governance and further economic development in those countries. However, it is essential to keep in mind that in any reform process, national ownership is primary.

Latvia is stepping up development assistance for Afghanistan and Central Asian states particularly in areas of transportation and customs. We see potential for further integration of these countries into the global economy by developing international trade routes. The Northern Distribution Network already connects the region with Europe through Latvia. We are confident that it can become a commercially viable long-term transit corridor also after 2014.

We are approaching an important turning point in Afghanistan. In order to secure the progress achieved, the international community must remain committed to the country's long-term development. Latvia will continue to support civilian policing and to train military personnel. We will also provide financial aid to the Afghan National Security Forces as of 2015.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sustainable development and prosperity go hand in hand. At times of recession - structural reforms and budgetary discipline, accompanied with economic stimulus bring results. While we can observe signs of global economic recovery, there is no room for complacency.

To ensure robust economic growth, we need to ensure that the young generation contributes to it. Quality education is the key to empowering people – it should reach all! Everybody should have genuine lifelong learning opportunities. Quality education is the foundation on which peaceful, prosperous and dignified societies are built.

After the economic downturn in 2008, Latvia has been the fastest growing EU economy for the last two years. We expect to maintain this strong growth trend at the level of at least 4 per cent annually [for the coming three years]. Latvia is now ready for further integration into the global economy by introducing the Euro in 2014 and by joining the OECD.

Empowered civil society is a key driver for sustainable development. We are proud that the people of Latvia actively engage in the decision-making process at all stages. In the 21st century the public involvement must be ensured both directly and on-line. Latvia has been working actively to protect and promote internet freedom as an important element of freedom of expression for an open and democratic society.

In conclusion, Latvia stands ready to contribute to the most fundamental development goals that should appear in the post-2015 agenda: those of promoting peace and human rights and fundamental freedoms. Therefore, we have put forward our candidacy for the elections to the UN Human Rights Council in 2014, and the UN Security Council in 2025. Latvia counts on the support of the Member States and assures that it will responsibly contribute to the work of those bodies.

I thank you, Mr President and I look forward to a fruitful 68th Session of the General Assembly.