

Address by the President of the Republic of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves at the
General Debate of the 69th United Nations General Assembly

Mr. President,
Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

in the 364 days since I last had the honor to address this assembly, the world has changed dramatically. We have seen a profound change in global security situation. There are unprecedented threats to peace and security in Post-World War Two Europe and the world, while terrorism, climate change, human rights violations and the spread of the Ebola virus continue to be global challenges.

We need a concerted effort to achieve peace and stability in Europe and the Middle East, and to restore the credibility of international law.

No circumstances can ever justify terrorism in any form. By signing UN anti-terrorism conventions, states have promised to prevent and investigate terrorist crimes and also to refrain from supporting or tacitly tolerating those crimes.

ISIL poses a serious threat to the people of Iraq and Syria as well as the broader Middle East. This terrorist organization executes prisoners, kills civilians and commits genocidal acts against religious and national minorities. Its brutality, barbarous crimes and extreme ideology threaten all of humanity. It challenges the universal human values enshrined in United Nations' documents. We must stop the terrorists. Estonia commends all global efforts to fight the ISIL and other terrorist organisations, and stands ready to contribute to those efforts. We welcome the adoption today of the UN Security Council resolution on foreign terrorist fighters.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

A quarter of a century ago, in the *annus mirabilis* 1989, Europe and the democratic world celebrated a historical sea change. The Berlin wall fell. The Cold War that had divided the world into hostile camps for half a century, ended.

This year we should celebrate an anniversary of the triumph of freedom and democracy.

But this year also turned out to be a year when the international order as we've known it since the Cold War has been violated and put in doubt. Cynical geopolitics in international relations has once again come to the fore. The international agreements upon which the stability of the post-Second World War security architecture relied, have been compromised.

Let me remind you of what we have collectively agreed upon.

The Charter of the United Nations, from 1945, declares: "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state."

In the Helsinki Accords from 1975 all trans-Atlantic countries agreed *not* to use force to change borders or challenge the political independence of any state. States agreed to regard one another's frontiers inviolable; to refrain from making each other's territory the object of military occupation. No such occupation or acquisition would be recognized as legal.

In the 1990 CSCE Charter of Paris for a New Europe all signatories, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, agreed to "fully recognize the freedom of States to choose their own security arrangements".

By annexing Crimea and invading Eastern Ukraine, one of the signatories has violated all of these agreements. Thus, we are in a completely new and unforeseen security environment. We must enforce the fundamental agreements on which our peace and security rely.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Ukrainian crisis is not solely a conflict between two countries. It is not even solely an European issue. If instead of agreements and laws, raw force will apply in international relations; if changing state borders by force will become an accepted norm, then the stability of the whole world will be threatened. As President Obama said this morning: "This is a vision of the world in which might makes right. [...] We believe that right makes might." So do we.

Such developments must be firmly condemned. The international community cannot leave Crimea as it is now. We cannot accept frozen conflicts created for geopolitical ends. Referenda that are in agreement with international law cannot be arranged in two weeks, in the presence of foreign armed forces. Results of such referenda cannot be considered valid. Independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity must remain the fundamental rights of states and nations.

That includes their right to direct their own future and to choose their allies – as stated in the CSCE Paris Charter. Such free choices by sovereign nations cannot be accepted as an excuse for aggression. However, it was exactly Ukraine's wish to choose its allies that was used as a justification for aggression. Its mere desire to enhance trade and political relations with the EU, which is *not* a "security arrangement", led to the country's dismemberment.

What can we do to restore the validity of international agreements?

There were warning signs about current events in Ukraine. Alarm bells rang already six years ago in Georgia, but no one heard the wake up call. We must take conflict prevention more seriously. We must support states in their choice of democracy, rule of law and human rights and decisions that follow from that.

These recent developments force us to seriously reconsider the role of the United Nations. How can one of the fundamental goals of the UN, global peace and security, be promoted when basic international agreements are ignored, state borders are changed and territories are annexed through force?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When we look at Syria, we cannot ignore that the Security Council has been paralyzed as international justice has been manipulated and multiple crises have escalated, with hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions of refugees as a consequence. The Security Council needs to be reformed. Its work methods and principles must be revised, with special attention to the openness, accountability and transparency of its processes.

The permanent members of UN Security Council bear enormous responsibility in guaranteeing international peace. No permanent member should abuse the veto to circumvent the principles of the UN Charter.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Human rights remains one of the most cherished values of the UN. Unfortunately, respect for human rights can still not be assumed.

We cannot accept arguments that for some countries human rights do not apply for cultural reasons suitable. Human rights, as stated in the Universal Declaration, are universal, inalienable and inviolable. They are based on the humanity and dignity of each and every person.

No peace or justice, stability or security can be guaranteed unless the basic rights of *all* human beings are respected and protected in every country, by all governments. We must pay special attention to the rights of the most vulnerable groups. Women's rights must be protected everywhere. We consider it crucial that empowering women and action against gender-based violence be implemented in accordance with UN Resolution 1325. We must respect the rights of children and minorities as well as indigenous people; we must care for people with special needs.

Free speech remains a crucial right. Some states have made efforts to stop the free flow of information on the Internet and to divide cyber space along state borders. This must be avoided. The Internet must remain a universal platform for uninhibited exchange of information.

Estonia is a proud member of the Freedom Online Coalition, a community of 23 nations committed to promoting free speech online and the multi-stakeholder model of a free and open Internet. It is a global initiative that brings together governments, NGOs, entrepreneurs and think tanks.

Last April the Freedom Online Coalition gathered in our capital and issued the Tallinn Agenda, a statement expressing our strongly shared conviction that all people are entitled to the same rights and freedoms, online as well as offline.

This is not a lifestyle question. The Internet is a driver of economic growth and a key tool for development. Since the 1990s it has blossomed into a global network of nearly three billion users. Most of the next billion Internet users will come from developing countries. The UN post 2015 Development Agenda should recognize the importance of new technologies and e-services as a major contribution to the security and prosperity of the world.

As we grow more dependent on digital services in our daily lives, we become more vulnerable to cyber attacks. Cyber security is essential not just for protecting rights,

but also for economic prosperity. Cyber attacks can paralyze crucial services or infrastructure, they can cause enormous economic damage. Limiting access to or censoring the contents of the Internet, however, is not the answer to cyber insecurity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Achieving sustainable development is essential in order to tackle some of the challenges we are facing. Even in the current fragile security environment, we must take care of the future of the planet and work towards a world where everybody can live a dignified life, free from poverty, violence and exclusion. In today's interdependent world, this is hard to achieve without peace and stability.

The world today also faces the outbreak of deadly virus. This is no longer a local concern of a few countries. Ebola has become an international public health emergency. Despite efforts made already by governments and international organizations the outbreak is racing ahead. We support the efforts of the Global Ebola Response Coalition, tasked contain and stop the spread of the virus.

Climate change is already becoming an existential threat to some countries. It has a dramatic impact on their living conditions and security. The small island developing states are most vulnerable. They are "the early warning system" for other nations – to quote the President of Kiribati, Mr. Anote Tong. If we do not act soon enough, other countries will be threatened as well. We must see this problem globally, not just from a perspective of short term national or economic interest.

The risks of conflict, violence, insecurity, financial and economic collapse, climate change, lack of resources and natural disasters are intertwined and need to be addressed in an integrated way. The new development agenda after 2015 must be truly universal. Sustainable development goals are best addressed together.

Peace and sustainable development can only be achieved by respecting human rights. That, in turn, presumes the rule of law, at the national as well as international levels. Progress in these fields is best guaranteed by good governance, transparency of decision-making and low corruption. Effective and accountable institutions are powerful enablers of sustainable development, and modern digital technology helps us in creating them. In Estonia we have developed an e-governance system that increases transparency and limits corruption. We have been sharing the system with all interested partners and we continue to be willing to do so.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since May 8 1945 we have believed that we had been freed of certain ideological demons for good. But now we see the return of the long discredited ideas from 1938. The existence of co-ethnics abroad has been used as a justification to annex territory. We've seen a return of ideologies of hatred, and lies and propaganda.

We must be clear in condemning extreme nationalism, homophobia, xenophobia and religious extremism. We need to recall and reaffirm the values that the United Nations were created to protect. The United Nations, a unique global instrument of security and peace, must succeed where the League of Nations once failed.

Let us not forget. 75 years ago on August 23, a pact was signed between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's USSR that divided Eastern Europe into their spheres of influence. A week later, on September 1, Hitler attacked Poland. On September 17 Hitler's then ally, the Soviet Union, also attacked Poland, and WW II had begun.

On August 31st this year, 20 years passed since occupation forces left Estonia. And yet just a few days later, on September 5th, an Estonian police officer was abducted by foreign security services on Estonian territory and taken by force to Moscow where he is still being held in the infamous prison, Lefortovo.

We cannot allow anyone ever again to divide countries into their "spheres of influence". The community of nations is only secure when its smallest members can feel secure. We cannot accept threats and intimidation in 21st century international relations. We cannot have peace, security or prosperity, in Europe or in the world, unless we find a way to re-enforce and revalidate the agreements that we all have signed.