

Address by President Edgars Rinkēvičs at the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly

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Madam President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

First, allow me to congratulate Her Excellency Annalena Baerbock on assuming the Presidency of the General Assembly. You will have Latvia's full cooperation. Latvia believes that we are stronger together – stronger in advancing peace. Fostering development. Upholding human rights.

Standing here, on this world stage, I would like to congratulate us on the 80th anniversary of the United Nations. 80 years working together to build a better, more just, and peaceful world. This task has never been easy. But it is our duty to persist with determination and give our very best.

I want to express Latvia's gratitude for the overwhelming support for our candidacy for the United Nations Security Council. We are beginning our term next year. This is our first term.

Latvia will take on this responsibility with a strong sense of duty. A duty to serve with integrity, transparency, and with a clear commitment to the principles of the United Nations. Latvia is honoured to serve on the Security Council for the good of people around the world. We will stand together for peace and resilience.

Latvia's three priorities in the Security Council are:

First, protect our rules-based international order.

Second, advocate for Women, Peace and Security agenda. Also protect the most vulnerable people amongst us.

Third, find solutions to emerging security threats. These include climate change, hybrid threats, the challenges related to the safety of artificial intelligence.

Excellencies,

The world is in disarray. Before our eyes we see blatant attempts to weaken the rules-based international order. The order that is rooted in the United Nations Charter. In effect a new world order is emerging. And it is not a better one. There is an attempt to recreate the world where the might makes right.

The permanent members of the Security Council undertook to maintain international peace and security. To prevent wars. To prevent devastation and loss of life. But it seems that one permanent member – Russia – doesn't want this.

Russia wants a world where brute force prevails over international law. Russia does not want peace. Russia wants to get what it wants. And Russia is willing to inflict destruction and misery on others. Unfortunately, Russia has partners in crime – notably Iran and North Korea.

But Ukraine is fighting back. Bravely. With all it has. Ukraine is facing an existential threat – to its people, its land, its freedom. Ukraine is fighting for all of us. For the rules-based international order. For independence and sovereignty. For territorial integrity. So that international borders are not changed by force. These actually are the very principles at the heart of the United Nations.

Latvia stands with Ukraine and will advocate for its sovereignty and territorial integrity at the United Nations Security Council. We are and will be advocates for Ukrainian children abducted by Russia. They must be returned. We will be advocates for the Ukrainian civilians who have lost their homes and livelihoods. Latvia will use its position on the United Nations Security Council to help achieve a just and lasting peace in Ukraine.

I want to express my appreciation to President Trump, President Zelenskyy and my European colleagues for their efforts to achieve peace. For trying to stop the unnecessary destruction and the misery we are witnessing in Ukraine.

It is our collective duty to uphold the principles of the United Nations Charter. Especially, when a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council openly violates them.

We need no reminding that the United Nations was founded on the ruins of the World War II. To save future generations from the scourge of war. To maintain international peace and security. To protect human life.

Distinguished delegates,

In war, it is the most innocent that pay the highest price. It is our duty to strengthen international cooperation to tackle the escalating crisis in Gaza. The humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza continues to spiral. Urgent action is needed to end civilian suffering.

Latvia condemns all terrorist attacks. Nothing can justify terrorism. We recognize Israel's legitimate right to self-defence. But it must be exercised in line with the international law and particularly – international humanitarian law. The law is there to protect every one of us.

Latvia calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The terrorist organization Hamas must release all hostages. Hamas must be destroyed as this organization is responsible for so much human suffering in the region. We need to ensure that the access to humanitarian aid in Gaza should be safe and unconditional.

The ongoing escalation confirms the need for a sustainable political solution. The need for a two-state solution in accordance with international parameters. The need to break the cycle of violence. To reach a just and lasting peace. A peace that addresses the security concerns and the legitimate aspirations of both the Israelis and Palestinians.

Latvia is keenly aware of the ongoing conflicts around the world. We must work together to resolve the dire humanitarian situation in Sudan and Democratic Republic of the Congo. We will not look on helplessly as crises unfold. As a member of the Security Council, we will call on the international community to take collective action and facilitate humanitarian aid. To try to end unnecessary human suffering.

Distinguished Delegates,

We must do everything in our power to protect the most vulnerable people. Especially, women and children. Women and girls suffer disproportionately in times of war. We, the global community, have a responsibility to protect the rights of women and girls. To empower them. To ensure their voices are heard in peace processes.

The forced deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia is beyond disturbing. We call on the United Nations to do more. Do much more. We will do all we can to help bring these children home.

Madam President,

It is not only conventional warfare that threatens peace, security and stability. Emerging threats like climate change, cyber-attacks, hybrid attacks, and the misuse of the Artificial Intelligence are testing us on daily basis.

Our modern world is connected in ways that most of us can't imagine. Today many countries are experiencing a growing wave of hybrid attacks. Also, Latvia. We have to deal with damage to undersea cables, GPS jamming, arson attacks, the Russian shadow fleet.

Russia continues and invents new provocations. Most recently recklessly violating the airspace of Poland and Estonia. The intensity of Russia's drone attacks against Ukraine has created incidents in Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania. This is the new reality. Russia bears full responsibility for these acts and also consequences. This kind of reckless behaviour is a direct threat to international peace and security. And we must act to stop it before such acts spiral out of control.

We must counter these threats by resilience and increased cooperation with our friends and allies. But hybrid warfare is evolving. As are emerging and disruptive technologies. The challenge is to maximize the benefits these technologies can bring, while remaining vigilant of the potential risk they pose.

We share the United Nations' view that we need to develop Artificial Intelligence responsibly. But we should not halt the progress. Artificial Intelligence can promote economic growth, drive scientific progress and innovation. Even improve healthcare and make education more accessible.

Artificial Intelligence is already part of our daily lives. We must acknowledge this reality and work to make it safer and more beneficial for the people. The governments should not take years to create regulations. We should act swiftly and do it right.

As a responsible United Nations member, a future United Nations Security Council member, Latvia is ready to work with our partners to address these issues.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The United Nations has stood the test of time for 80 years. It is the primary architect of international law and protector of rules-based international order. The United Nations is not perfect. But it is the best we have. The only truly global organisation. As one of UN Secretary Generals Dag Hammarskjöld famously said: "The United Nations was not created in order to bring us to heaven, but in order to save us from hell."

But after 80 years it is time to adjust to new realities. The United Nations must evolve. To remain relevant. To be effective and fit for the challenges ahead. That is why we support the UN80 initiative by the Secretary General.

Let us work together for peace and resilience. Let us protect the rules-based international order and the United Nations Charter. Because we all are better together.

Thank you!

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