



ESTONIA

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ADDRESS BY
H.E. MR ARNOLD RÜÜTEL

PRESIDENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA

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600 THIRD AVENUE 26th FLOOR NEW YORK, NY 10016 TEL 212 883 0640 FAX 212 883 0648

The President of the Republic of Estonia
Address at the fifty-ninth Session of the UN General Assembly
New York, September 22, 2004

Mr. President,

Allow me to congratulate you on the election to the office of the President of the fifty-ninth Session of the General Assembly. I wish you success and strength in your responsible work. My commendation also goes to your predecessor Mr. Julian Hunte for the leadership he provided to the fifty-eight Session of the General Assembly.

The current Session is significant also to Estonia, to my homeland. For Estonia it is the first time to participate in the work of the UN General Assembly as a Member State of the European Union and NATO. Clearer than ever before we are aware of our co-responsibility for the wellbeing of the world, but we are also aware of our vulnerability to global threats.

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Distinguished Delegates,

During the last years we all have witnessed the rise of new threats that endanger the world peace and security, and we have seen the relationship with economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems. The fifty-eight Session of the General Assembly has kept the situation in Iraq in the focus of its attention. Securing peace and stability in the Middle East region still causes worries to us. I would like to believe that this has deepened our conviction that the goals and principles expressed in the UN Charter have not lost their actuality but rather on the contrary. In the situation of today's new threats and changed global security, the need for joint solutions is more acute than never before. The UN is the only organisation that has been created to coordinate the efforts of the states in safeguarding international stability and security. The United Nations Organisation has to be even more decisive and efficient in order to perform such a responsible role successfully in a new situation.

Mr President,

Abatement of poverty in the world, which is one of the central issues on the global development agenda, would facilitate international stability and security. International community has made a commitment to fulfil Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015 - by that time the proportion of people living in poverty has to be reduced by half. This is an optimistic promise, the precondition of which is that the activities of all states would be even more

purposeful and coordinated. High level international conferences held in Doha, Monterrey and Johannesburg showed us the direction we should move; now we need concrete deeds.

The 2005 Summit is nearing where we review our progress in fulfilling goals set in the UN Millennium Declaration. Let us act in a way that we could be content with the conclusions given in the interim report!

Estonia together with other UN Member States shares responsibility for securing balanced development in the world and makes its contribution to achievement of our common goals. Having only recently been a recipient country of international aid we are very much aware of the necessity for coordination and harmonization of activities. We started to provide international aid in 1998. Time has shown that the experience, which Estonia has accumulated from building up its democratic institutions, implementing economic reforms and involvement of civil society in public life and decision making process, could help other countries, where such processes are still in the initial stage.

Regardless of what has already done to achieve the grandiose Millennium Development Goals we have to profess regretfully that the gap between rich and poor is widening. Even more, it reveals itself in our rapidly changing world in ever-newer forms. In addition to economic inequality the information era has brought along also so called "digital divide" or in other words, a divide between information rich and information poor states and nations and between social groups. I would like to elaborate on this topic briefly.

In spite of the rapid development in information and communication technology during the last ten years, the so-called "digital revolution" has been a playing ground for a small group of privileged countries and social groups. Let's have a look at the access to Internet. Though many of us cannot imagine life without Internet, four fifths of world population has never had any contact with Internet. More than a half of Internet users live in Europe or in North America, which together make up only 17 per cent of world population. In Africa only 1.4 per cent of population uses Internet.

The digital divide exists not only between countries but also within countries between different social groups. The reason causing such a divide can be age, gender, language, education or income.

The digital divide is a reflection of technological and social-economic backwardness. It shows the lack of necessary infrastructure or that the price to use the infrastructure is too high. At the same time the digital divide is not only an expression of existing social-economic inequality but is also its amplifier and even a cause of it. Today the social and economic value of the access to information is even higher than it used to be twenty years ago. In longer perspective unequal access to information, knowledge and information networks

and unequal opportunity to make your own contribution leads to further marginalisation of poorer countries and poorer social groups. It is a paradox that behind this is the same Internet, which is the most efficient and cheapest way to global exchange of information and knowledge!

As information and communication technology has a strong impact on economic growth and competitiveness, there is no doubt that it is a new development policy factor. This is why in recent years more and more attention has been turned to the reasons and consequences of digital divide. Also the UNDP Human Development Report 2001 concentrated on those problems and it was in the focus of attention also at the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva.

It is my pleasure to say that in a short period of time Estonia has achieved a remarkable level in several areas of information and communication technology. We have managed to create a favourable environment for development in this field and have facilitated close cooperation between public sector, companies and civil society associations in order to build necessary infrastructure. As an outcome of our efforts several information society services are now accessible also for those citizens of Estonia who have limited financial resources. What concerns e-readiness of Estonia then according to an assessment of *The Economist* as of 2004 Estonia takes the 26th place in the world and holds a leading position among Central and Eastern European countries. More than a half of Estonian population regularly uses internet services, 38 per cent owns computers and 80 per cent owns mobile phones, 62 per cent uses the services of internet bank and 59 per cent fill their tax returns electronically. Estonians can communicate both with central government and local governments over Internet and use legally binding digital signatures. These indicators rank as average in Europe though GDP in Estonia is considerably lower than the average GDP in Europe.

I believe that as a former transition country Estonia has experience, which could be very useful for developing countries in developing information and communication technology. We have to admit that in Estonia the potential of giving development aid first of all includes knowledge based counselling. We have already taken some steps to that direction. In the summer of 2002, in cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Estonia, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Information Program of Open Society Institute (OSI) an e-Governance Academy was set up in Estonia. The main purpose of this very specific Academy is to improve the co-operation in the field of ICT between public and private sector representatives. The target countries of this joint project are first of all Central and Eastern European countries, countries of CIS and Asian countries, though the future plans already involve also African countries. By today the e-Governance Academy has successfully carried out training courses for officials from Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Albania, Kazakhstan and other countries.

Mr. President,
 Mr. Secretary-General,
 Distinguished Delegates,

The year 2004 is the last year of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. Being an Estonian I have a specific reason to talk about indigenous people – we ourselves are a nation, which knows how important it is to take care of the preservation and development of one's culture and language. Therefore I am very happy that during last decades the activities of the UN and its subsidiary bodies in protection of the rights of indigenous people have gathered impetus.

Be it so that the end of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People does not mean that the attention paid to the situation of indigenous peoples would lessen! The rights of indigenous people have to be stipulated on the international level without any further delay. Estonia firmly supports the elaboration and adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as soon as possible. Regardless of locally made progress many peoples of the world still lack sureness about preservation of their culture and language. Any restriction of the rights of indigenous peoples is one of the reasons behind emerging of hot spots and crisis situations.

Scientists enter endangered species Book in order to ensure measures, which save such species from extinction. We do not have a Red Book of Peoples yet. When any of species disappears the world's natural environment would become poorer and ecological balance could be damaged. Any extinction of peoples means that the whole world would become intellectually and culturally poorer!

Referring to continually increasing marginalization of indigenous peoples and worsening of their living conditions, the anthropologists have even used a metaphorical concept – "the fourth world".

The living conditions of Finno-Ugric peoples on their hereditary area of settlement serve as a worrying example. Also the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly has shown its worries in that respect. In August this year the 4th World Congress of the Finno-Ugric Peoples – 'Youth is our Future' – took place in Estonia. The final document of the Congress expresses concern about continuous loss of national identity of the Finno-Ugric peoples and calls on the international community to pay more attention to the protection of human rights, the rights of indigenous peoples and national minorities.

Mr. President,

Concluding my presentation I would like to touch upon the future of the United Nations Organisation. The UN needs to be strengthened and improved and thus it needs reorganisation in order to better respond to new challenges. Such reorganisation would ensure more efficient functioning of the UN system, its reliability and authority. The consistent development of the organisation and reforming it into as efficient as possible multilateral body is a common goal of all Member States and Estonia fully supports it. More attention should be turned to crises and conflicts prevention. We all are waiting for the publication of the High-Level Panel Report on December 1, which might give essential guidelines how to make the activity of the UN more efficient in changed global framework.

Discussions on "revitalization" of the work of the General Assembly, thanks to the efforts of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, President of the fifty-eight Session Julian Hunte and cooperation of Member States, have given a concrete and desirable result, which reflects in the Resolution adopted July I. It is an essential landmark in the process of changing and modernizing the General Assembly in accordance to the development of world events. At the fifty-ninth Session under the leadership of President Jean Ping we have to continue and intensify our work in this direction.