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Permanent Mission of Latvia to the United Nations
333 East 50th Street, New York, NY 10022
Telephone (1 212) 838-8877
E-mail: mission.un-ny@mfa.gov.lv

Statement by H.E. Mr. Edgars Rinkēvičs
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia

at

the 73rd session of the United Nations General
Assembly

United Nations, New York
29 September 2018

Madam President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

I wish to congratulate Ms. Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcés on assuming the post of President of the current session of the General Assembly and provide assurances of Latvia's full support. I also express gratitude to Mr. Miroslav Lajčák for his active role as President of previous Session of the UN General Assembly.

Distinguished Delegates!

I address this Assembly in a very special time for my country. This year, Latvia is celebrating its centennial. A remarkable change occurred one hundred years ago. The end of World War I

and collapse of empires resulted in the liberation of nations and brought about a fundamental revision of Europe's political map.

A new Europe was born which promised much more than just self-determination, freedom and democracy. The peoples of Europe expected lasting peace and prosperity. These objectives were pursued both individually and collectively. Peoples' right to self-determination materialized in concrete forms. New nation-states were born.

The Paris Peace conference laid the foundation for the League of Nations. It was the first international organisation whose principal mission was to maintain universal peace through the development of binding norms and multilateralism. Latvia also joined the League of Nations firmly establishing its status as a full-fledged member of the international family. However, the weakness of the League of Nations was one of the main reasons why Latvia for a time lost its independence.

The history of both Soviet and Nazi occupations of Latvia and much of the European continent is a harsh reminder of what happens when serious violations of international law are tolerated. We know all too well the consequences of allowing countries to break these principles with impunity. In Latvia's case, it was a life under occupation by Nazi and Communist regimes of terror and gross violations of human rights.

We are grateful to all those nations that for decades implemented policies of non-recognition of the occupation of the Republic of Latvia and stuck to their principles. In accordance with international law, the state of Latvia continued existing throughout the occupation period.

However, the Russian Federation, the official successor of the Soviet Union still does not acknowledge well-documented facts of history. I call on Russia to embrace the truth and to clearly condemn the actions of the Soviet Union.

Since the restoration of independence in 1991, Latvia has been advocating compliance with international law and human rights. The protection of these principles was needed throughout the transition to a democratic society governed by the rule of law, and in building Latvia's role internationally.

Excellencies!

The topic of this year's debate invites us to focus on the very heart of the United Nations. The Charter of the United Nations starts with the words "We the peoples of the United Nations", thus pointing out the aim of the organization to represent rights and interests of every human being on the planet.

The United Nations was founded not only to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, but also to respect the obligations of international law.

Human rights, including women's rights and children's rights, are among the most fundamental values of the United Nations. The organization must be capable of defending these values in any situation: be it bombing of civilians in Syria, massacres of Rohingyas in Myanmar, persecution of Crimean Tatars by Russian authorities, or other human rights violations wherever they occur.

This year, we mark 70 years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It remains the main global source for inspiration to continue the work to ensure that all people may live with dignity and benefit from the blessings of freedom and equality.

Security and human rights go hand in hand. Security cannot be achieved without respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. A free press has been, and continues to be vital for peace, justice and human rights for all.

Hence, I once again urge Russia to release illegally detained Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov who enters day 139 of his hunger strike today. I call on Myanmar authorities to free two Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo.

I also call on Russia to immediately release other 64 Ukrainian political prisoners it has detained including journalist Roman Sushchenko.

I urge nations to adhere to their commitments and obligations under international law and human rights, especially regarding freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, which have notably deteriorated the past year.

Distinguished Delegates!

In order to strengthen the role of the United Nations, efforts should be made to uphold the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

In August, the world lost an inspirational leader, a strong advocate for peace and human rights, the former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who argued that “we will not enjoy security without development, [nor] enjoy development without security, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights.”

The three pillars of the Charter are greater than the sum of their individual parts. Economic progress and sustainable development are based on a long-term stability, which in turn requires peace and security, and respect for human rights.

Excellencies!

The United Nations must be able to change, to undertake serious reforms and therefore to respond to the 21st century accordingly.

We need a relevant and efficient United Nations.

Latvia welcomes the reforms initiated by the Secretary General in the three areas of peace and security, development, and management. It is important that reforms are implemented swiftly.

This is a unique organisation with a heavy responsibility. The authority of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security must be preserved. Security Council reform is long overdue, and we should all aim for strengthening the legitimacy of this important body.

However, stalemate in the Security Council reform must not impede progress elsewhere. The UN reform must include serious improvements in the protection and promotion of human rights. Achieving sustainable development through the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda cannot be complete without the strengthening of human rights around the world.

The Human Rights Council must be strong, effective and must have the ability to quickly react to serious human rights violations in any part of the world. Latvia is actively engaged in the process of improving the effectiveness of the Human Rights Council. I invite all countries to join this process with an open mind.

Latvia supports the Secretary General's vision and approach for the prevention-focussed United Nations. This is even more important given the increasingly complex global security challenges we face. Unprevented conflicts and crises around the world drag on for years and decades, destroying human lives, holding back development and draining the resources of the UN.

The conflicts in Syria, and Ukraine and Yemen continue to take a heavy toll on civilians. We must also not forget about the protracted instability in Burundi and Afghanistan. The mere length of preventable conflicts undermines the credibility of international organizations, including the United Nations.

The UN Security Council, as the main guarantor of international peace and security, has a particular responsibility in preventing conflicts, acts of aggression, and mass atrocities. The use of the veto to shield narrow national interests in situations of mass atrocities is totally unacceptable.

Territorial integrity and sovereignty as enshrined in the purposes and principles of the UN Charter must be respected by all. The Russian Federation must stop its aggression against Ukraine. Latvia together with international community will maintain non-recognition policy concerning the illegal annexation of Crimea.

I believe that one day international law and justice will prevail, and territorial integrity of Ukraine, as well as of other European Union's eastern partners, will be restored. The United Nations, along with the relevant regional players, must remain involved and committed to resolving protracted conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The history of the Baltic countries is proof of the moral power of international law and justice. The international community must be more active in solving these issues.

No nation was ever secure in isolation. Therefore, Member States have a responsibility for one another's security. The clear consequences for the aggressor, resolute international pressure and accountability for violations of international law are essential for political resolution of the conflict. A settlement of protracted conflicts in wider Europe remains of utmost importance for the international community.

Reaching the Sustainable Development Goals is the ultimate prevention agenda. They address the drivers and root causes of instability and conflict. Investing in human dignity, eradicating poverty, fostering climate resilience and promoting economic and social progress will reduce the incidence of conflict, instability and despair.

Therefore, the principles of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability guide all Latvia's activities of development cooperation. Furthermore, gender equality is vital for achieving sustainable development goals. It is an essential precondition for inclusive sustainable development as well as for economic growth and prosperity.

Distinguished Delegates!

At the beginning of the 20th century, combatants accounted for 90% of conflict related casualties. Today, 90% of casualties in armed conflicts are civilians. Conventional arms kill around 500 thousand people per year, out of which 70 thousand are killed in conflict zones. These figures clearly prove that the international community must focus not only on weapons of mass destruction but also on conventional arms.

With that in mind Latvia assumed the Presidency of the Arms Trade Treaty for next year and will spare no effort to promote its objectives. I call on all States to become parties to the Arms Trade Treaty, which would also contribute in a direct way to attainment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

We must join our efforts to strengthen the principle of multilateralism. In an interdependent and globalized world we can address and resolve global problems only through multilateral means. In this regard, the UN stands out as a good global governance instrument, but it is not a global government. The ability of the United Nations to meet the challenges of the present world depends heavily on the decisions of governments and on the support of populations for these decisions.

With this, I want to emphasize that the future of multilateralism will depend more on changes in the attitude of member states than on reforms of the UN system. However, until the fundamental characteristics of the international system are not changed, the UN can only strive for higher effectiveness and efficiency.

Distinguished Delegates!

We should admit the United Nations for what it is. It is not perfect. Yet it is very necessary instrument for maintenance of peace, economic development, codification of international law, for a more secure world.

The United Nations can be and must be a significant global player, a community of nations proud of its values, committed to multilateralism and the principles of international law.

The member states must support our organization to project these values worldwide thus affirming its unique role on the global stage. To achieve that purpose the UN needs well-functioning norms, efficient institutions and clear vision about its policies.

Thank you for your attention!