

**Address by the President of the Republic of Estonia Kersti Kaljulaid at the  
General Debate of the 72st United Nations General Assembly**

**September 19, 2017**

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

Our world is unpredictable. Much of this unpredictability stems from climate change. Climate change can be counterbalanced by rapid technological disruption of our wasteful ways of life. But it is easy to see that technological development, at this moment especially the rapid upscaling of digital technologies into the hands of billions, while it certainly has a positive transformation potential, adds to the difficulties of understanding our future.

This new world offers opportunities. Unfortunately, it also enhances the risks. To grab the first and manage the last we need flexible and quick action also on global stage.

Estonia, a nation of just over one million, is sensitive to the fact that unpredictability is especially hard to cope with for those who are inherently weak – poor, disabled, very young or very old. It is hard for those made weak by discrimination – often women, ethnic and religious minorities. Estonia itself has gone through a rapid transformation period of a quarter of a century, after regaining independence. As our economic and social statistics prove, we were quite good to protect the weaker in our society while rapidly adapting and growing our economy. We know it can be done.

We suffered long from Hobbesian position of international community that liberty might bring chaos, that bad rule is better than no rule. Therefore, our guiding principles have been those of John Lock, of rule of law, of checks and balances, of individual rights. Notably, Lock also initially believed what Thomas Hobbes had postulated – but changed his mind while on a diplomatic mission observing a civil society of Brandenburg, the way of life where different ideas had the right to “quietly coexist”, as he put it. This debate is still with us in the current world.

We now want to offer our know-how on empathic, inclusive development to the global discussion table. Estonia is aspiring to become the elected member of the UN Security Council for the period of 2020-21. As a small state which was occupied for 50 years of its 100 years of history, we are sensitive to the worries of all those, states and people, who lack capacity to withstand global tides.

There are too many states in the world which suffer from unresolved conflicts. These are states which could take care of their own population and contribute at the global scene, if we were quicker to manage the conflicts which are holding them back or, worse, threatening to tear them apart.

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Ongoing military aggression in Eastern Ukraine continues to stir conflict and cause casualties amongst the civilians, including loss of a member of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission. Crimean peninsula remains occupied, as do parts of Georgia. There are protracted conflicts in Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh.

There are many countries which have been torn apart by the tensions we saw, but could not dissipate in time to avoid the worst.

The world has lost half a million people in Syria. Estonia supports the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, established in December 2016, to assist in the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

We cannot overlook the escalating sufferings of the people of **Yemen** or ignore the fate of the Rohingya people. We need to put more effort into humanitarian action to tackle hunger, diseases and epidemics looming in the country. Our common efforts in fighting famine and hunger are also crucial in **South-Sudan, Somalia and Nigeria**.

Not every state is using its resources and efforts, its technological advances, to the benefit of its people. North Korea is an acute threat to the world peace.

There are also considerable risks to the global stability which are not any more linked to any particular state. The risk of terrorism is metastatic. Having started from disappointments and disillusionment of people from failed and failing states, it has spread globally.

The key to successfully countering terrorism and violent extremism lies in our cooperation on all levels – national, regional and global. The Secretary General's initiative to restructure the counter-terrorism architecture at the UN make the global efforts more coordinated and transparent. Effective counter terrorism measures and the protection of human rights are mutually reinforcing, not conflicting goals.

Ladies and gentlemen, all the above, enhanced already now, but unfortunately even more in the future, by the real effects of the climate change, has led to the highest number of displaced people ever seen globally.

As with all global challenges, the UN is the natural entity to work out and agree on a solution. Last year we agreed the New York Declaration on migration and refugees. We must address the root causes and drivers for irregular migration to improve border management and fight trafficking in human beings.

It includes facilitating the opportunities for legal migration. I would like to emphasize that the underlying basic values of our joint endeavours are humanism and solidarity. A bitter lesson from Estonia's own history, when we were dispersed around the world due to occupations and World War II, is how important is the empathy towards the refugees fleeing the atrocities of war and destruction.

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If we want to tackle the root causes of migration, we must tackle **climate change**. It has become the **defining issue of our time**. Joint efforts to combat climate change on global scale could never become possible without the coordinating role of United Nations and the platform offered by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. We trust Fijian Presidency to achieve concrete results during the 23rd COP this November, building on the Paris achievements from last year.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as the society-led response to the threats of climate change shows, the big, universal problems can be tackled by inclusive societies. Inclusive societies are fundamental to empathic and inclusive development. However, in recent years we have witnessed the shrinking of the space for civil society. This trend must be reversed.

One of the most prominent guarantees for empathic, inclusive development, for democracy and the rule of law is to **mainstream gender equality** into all areas of life. It is proven that equitable treatment of women and men has a multiplier effect in eradicating poverty. Estonian welfare development plan for 2016-2023 covers policy areas from employment and social inclusion to equal opportunities in applying one's talent in all walks of life. Our goal is balanced participation of women and men in all levels of decision-making and management – both in public and private sectors.

It is important not to forget about **gender balance in conflict situations** either. Engagement of women already in the early stages of prevention, resolving crises, and building peace reduces the probability of relapses to violent conflict. Therefore, we need to **encourage women's participation in peace processes** and acknowledge them as actors of change with great potential. And we must never tire in implementing UN Security Council **resolution 1325** and related resolutions on women, peace and security on every level. The adoption of the Peace Building Commission's gender strategy last year is a worthy milestone on this road.

For women to fully enjoy their role in the society it is crucial to eliminate **gender based violence**. We should ensure that survivors are treated with dignity and that the perpetrators are held accountable for their crimes. Estonia continues to support actions addressing gender based violence and reproductive health needs of most vulnerable women and adolescent girls, for example via UNFPA in Ukraine 2017, and by supporting #shedecides initiative.

I am convinced that Sec General Guterres' s commendable effort to bring more women into UN decision making is an inspiration to women globally. It will also have tangible effect on UN policy development, making it more empathic and inclusive.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, the use of **information technology and Internet** are part of everyday life of people everywhere. Estonia can share our experience on how to **best utilize e-governance** to achieve the SDGs more efficiently and at lower cost. Estonia has been organizing an event series at the UN with the aim to introduce the already well proven benefits of our e-governance to international community. We hope that the events will lead to concrete action and partnerships. Moreover, this summer **Estonia and Singapore** launched the **Group of Friends on E-Governance and Cybersecurity**. The aim of the group is to raise awareness, share best practices and promote capacity building now when these topics are becoming increasingly important at the UN level.

Digital change is everywhere. Its biggest effect on us right now is making geography obsolete. Attacks via cyberspace know no range. Friendships and partnerships formed in cybersphere know no borders. It makes us closer to each other globally. A digitally enhanced global civil society functions better if states provide their people with safe means of digital communication. In analogue world it is easy to identify yourself, even to people you do not know, as states have provided us with passports. Similar identification need exists in cyber space, yet too few governments provide the means of safe identification. The governments need to catch up and give this possibility to their people, to protect them and to allow them to transact and communicate safely online.

A greater dependence on electronic services has, however, resulted in greater vulnerability in **cyberspace**. This does not mean we can or should try to stop digital progress. We need to continue efforts to analyse **how international law applies to the use of ICT**, particularly the principle of due diligence, countermeasures, potential application of the right to self-defence and International Humanitarian Law. I call upon all states, which have not yet done so, to accede to the Council of Europe Convention on cybercrime.

I would also like to underline the statement of the Freedom Online Coalition in which they expressed deep concern over the growing trend of intentional, state-sponsored disruptions of both access and dissemination of information online. No one should be denied the right of peaceful assembly, the freedoms of association, opinion and expression, be it by the means of physical presence or online.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In order to address all the aforementioned challenges successfully **we need strong United Nations**. Estonia welcomes the Secretary General's UN reform agenda. We strongly support the efforts to link the reform of UN's Peace and Security architecture with the reform of the UN Development System. We welcome the emphasis on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, creating societies resilient to vulnerabilities.

Estonia's Chairmanship of the Second Committee of the United Nations General Assembly is being firmly guided by the principles of inclusivity and empathy. It is in our common interest that the Second Committee tackles the global challenges that fall under its remit, and we count on your good faith in achieving this.

As a member of the **Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group** Estonia is working closely together with a number of countries to improve the working methods of the Security Council and the functioning of the UN as a whole.

We need empathy and inclusivity also in the Security Council. That is why Estonians hope that our first-time candidature for the **seat of a non-permanent member for the period 2020-21 will be successful**.

**We regained independence 26 years ago, but already have 22 years of participation in UN peacekeeping under our belt. As a small country we care for all those who are vulnerable in this world. As a digital society we are a story of hope, a story of rapid transformation from poor country recovering from occupation to one which is able to provide for its own citizens and contribute to multilateral cooperation. Again, as a digital state we consider transparency and being close to people an obligation of a state; and are adamant supporters of rules-based decision making and clarity of the processes. We fit in with those who want to make UN more nimble to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

Thank you for your attention.