

Statement
by the President of the Republic of Lithuania
Ms. Dalia Grybauskaitė
at the General Debate of the United Nations General Assembly

19 September 2017, New York

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The topic of this year's debate invites to focus on people and our responsibility to ensure their peaceful and sustainable future.

However, in today's world such peaceful future is threatened as never before.

Authoritarian regimes continue to kill with impunity, extremist ideologies treat innocent people with unspeakable cruelty and thousands die after leaving their homes in search for better lives.

The world's attention is now focused on North Korea and Syria, but the same methods of blackmail, bullying and aggression are being used by Russia in Ukraine and along NATO's eastern border.

As we speak, around one hundred thousand Russian troops are engaged in offensive military exercises "Zapad 2017" on the borders of Baltic States, Poland and even in the Arctic. The Kremlin is rehearsing aggressive scenarios against its neighbours, training its army to attack the West. The exercise is also part of information warfare aimed at spreading uncertainty and fear.

Even more disturbingly, Zapad exercise is just one symptom of Kremlin's inability to finally end its hatred towards the West.

Despite Russia's special responsibility to protect international peace as permanent member of the Security Council, it violated the UN Charter by attacking Georgia, illegally annexing Crimea, and directly participating in the war in Eastern Ukraine.

Kremlin's arsenal does not stop at conventional weapons. Russia continues to meddle in elections, conducts cyber-attacks and uses its "sputniks" to spread fake news and destabilising propaganda.

Energy blackmail has long become Russia's weapon of choice. In Belarus, just forty kilometres from Lithuania's capital, it is building the unsafe Astravets nuclear power plant as a geopolitical weapon that fails to comply with basic international nuclear standards.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Abuses and indifference to basic international norms by regimes across the world are not unrelated cases. Too often they are a result of our collective failure to condemn and properly react to violations.

Time and time again we have no courage to enforce the rules that we ourselves create. We draw red lines in the sand and then pretend they don't exist.

This has to change. Bullies are aggressive precisely because they are weak and insecure. That is why we must stop being passive observers and start calling things by their own names.

Aggression cannot make anyone stronger. It can never earn anyone even a drop of respect. The only thing the aggression will bring is contempt, shame and condemnation.

The international community has to take its share of responsibility. We cannot let fear win by closing our eyes to violators, because it will only encourage them to go further.

We must learn to read the warning signs, because abuse of human rights, nationalistic rhetoric and suppression of free speech explode into violence if ignored.

Finally, we must change the UN. This unique universal body was created to save the world from wars. So far it has failed to fulfil this promise.

Now we face the choice: either we give this organisation the voice to rise against the abuse or we will make it irrelevant.

Thank you.