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Statement by

H.E. Mr. Raimonds Vējonis
President of the Republic of Latvia

at

**the 72nd session of the United Nations General
Assembly**

United Nations, New York
20 September 2017

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**“Focusing on people: striving for peace and a decent life for all
on a sustainable planet”**

Mr. President, Excellencies!

[At the outset, I wish to congratulate you, Mr. Lajčák, on assuming the post of President of the current session of the General Assembly. I am sure you will make our region proud.]

The United Nations is, and will be, the central forum for multilateralism and a rules-based global order. This is the place where all nations come together to carry our shared responsibility to deliver peace and security, advance human rights and sustainable development, and cooperate for a better future.

As the only truly global organization, the United Nations must be able to effectively respond to the serious global issues which we face: regional conflicts and humanitarian crises, the threat of terrorism, and insecurities related to migration, climate change, and poverty. Individuals and their need for peace and a decent life are at the center of all these challenges. We must be able to deliver on these needs – as individual nations and as the United Nations.

It is no secret that the organization has grown too complex and bureaucratic to be able to respond to today's challenges in a swift manner. Some even question its credibility and relevance. Latvia also wishes to see the United Nations more effective, more transparent, and more flexible, so it can bring positive, real influence to people on the ground.

While the most recent global agreements have shown that effective multilateralism is possible, we must bring the values and goals of **the UN closer to the people**. The UN must preserve, and in some instances, regain, the trust of citizens and member states in its ability to prevent and respond to crises, and to promote a rules-based global order.

The **new UN Secretary-General António Guterres** was elected on a platform of change. Latvia welcomes his appointment and fully supports his vision of more effective United Nations. The Secretary-General's actions and ideas related to qualitative change and reforms in the UN are very encouraging signs. Reforms are never an easy task, but with patience, clear goals, and the cooperation of the UN system and member states, it is possible. The Secretary-General has our full support for his endeavors.

Mr. President,

All people on this planet need **peace**. For people to fully realize their potential, a stable and secure environment is essential. In too many places conflicts seem to have no end. The very basic principles of international law are violated, borders are changed by force, and human lives suffer. Far too often the United Nations has been unable to prevent conflicts, stop atrocities, or build peace. Too often resources are spent on managing and responding to crises, instead of preventing them.

The UN Security Council bears a particular responsibility for ensuring peace. Its members, especially the veto-wielding members, should move beyond their domestic interests in the name of genuinely addressing global challenges. People see the failures of the UN Security Council as the failures of the UN. We cannot expect trust in the UN if its Security Council does not deliver. Latvia also reiterates its call for the Security Council's reform which is long overdue.

From his first day on the job the UN Secretary-General has made a strong appeal for peace and the prevention of conflicts. We fully support him in this endeavor. **Conflict prevention** must be at the core of UN action to keep situations of concern from spiraling out of control. Saving human lives and upholding human dignity must be our common priority.

Tools for prevention have long been available, including in the United Nations Charter. But we need to move from a mere commitment to preserve a rules-based global order, to actions to restore it where it has been broken. Latvia will continue to promote democracy, good governance, human rights, and the rule of law as key factors for global stability.

Today **security** is truly a global issue. In particular, Latvia is deeply worried about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the threat of the use of nuclear weapons.

North Korea's actions have increased global insecurity. Latvia strongly condemns all nuclear tests and launches of ballistic missiles conducted by North Korea, and its continuous provocative rhetoric. We call on North Korea to return to a credible and meaningful dialogue with the international community and to refrain from any further action that would increase regional tensions.

It is a priority to find a peaceful and diplomatic solution to this situation. In the meantime, all States must fully implement relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

The use of chemical weapons in Syria, which blatantly disregards Syria's obligations as a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, is a deplorable crime which must be fully investigated, and the perpetrators must be held accountable.

Latvia has constantly called for accountability regarding these attacks, an accountability which is closely linked to the credibility of the whole international system. For this reason, Latvia has supported the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to assist the investigation and prosecution of serious crimes committed in Syria. We will continue to support the Syrian people and the UN-led political process towards a political resolution of this bloody conflict which has lasted far too long.

Global terrorism is one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. The unwavering efforts of the Global Coalition to defeat *Daesh* have degraded the capabilities of *Daesh* across all fronts. Latvia welcomes important victories, such as the liberation of Mosul in Iraq. However, our fight is far from over, and we have

to think about new strategies and secure new domains as the threat of terrorism becomes more asymmetric and globally dispersed.

Besides military efforts, we must continue to disrupt the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, dismantle financing networks, and counter online and offline propaganda that sets youth on a path towards radicalization.

We are pleased to see that the Riga Protocol on Foreign Terrorist Fighters to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism entered into force this July. We encourage more states to accede to this instrument for addressing the threat that affects countries of origin and of destination.

International support will be required to help stabilize liberated areas in Syria and Iraq to allow refugees and internally displaced persons to return and start rebuilding their lives. Latvia provides training to Iraqi security forces and financial support for stabilization efforts.

Mr. President,

Solving existing conflicts is essential for preventing new ones. We must stand firm on the **rules based security order in Europe**. The

territorial integrity of independent states must be respected by all, including by the Russian Federation.

Russia's unprovoked aggression against its neighbors is a serious breach of international security rules. There must be accountability for violations of international law for any aggressor who initiates and sustains these conflicts.

For Latvia, the peaceful resolution of the conflict in **Ukraine and** respecting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity is a priority. Russia's continued aggression in Eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol cannot become "business as usual".

We support diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis in the Normandy format and in the framework of the Trilateral Contact Group, so as to achieve full implementation of the Minsk agreements by all parties involved. International monitors must be granted access to Crimea, and human rights violations against residents of Crimea, including Crimean Tatars, must stop.

The United Nations, along with the relevant regional actors, should remain involved in, and committed to, facilitating the resolution of the **protracted conflicts** in Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Mr. President,

Last year I stressed that strengthening of the **development and security nexus** must become our mission. Our priority must be achieving peace and a decent life for everyone, including for the most vulnerable among us.

We must tackle the root causes preventing us from attaining sustainable development. If conflicts, hardships, and poverty continue, migration and the flow of refugees will further increase. The far-reaching impact of climate change on global security cannot simply be disregarded. We must carry on with our joint commitment to tackle climate change, so that coming generations can live on this planet in a sustainable way. Latvia is fully committed to the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Now is the time for putting in place the mechanisms of **implementation of the 2030 Agenda**. This needs to be done at all levels – national, regional, and global, in true partnership with all stakeholders. We welcome the current review of the United Nations development system in order to meet the ambitious goals of the 2030 Agenda.

Next year Latvia will present a Voluntary National Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to the UN High Level Political

Forum on Sustainable Development. Our national focus is on putting people first, as it will lead to long lasting development gains.

Latvia is ready to share its experience with implementing the 2030 Agenda through development cooperation.

In strengthening the capacities of our partner countries, we prioritize good governance and public sector reforms, combatting corruption, and fostering inclusive economic growth, including by empowering women.

Mr. President,

To enjoy peace and development our societies need space and institutions for free, open, and enlightened public debate where truth can be sought, knowledge shared, and lies exposed. This belief is also at the heart of our approach to countering purposeful and malicious **propaganda** and disinformation emanating from both state and non-state actors. Our answer to this challenge is to reassert the fundamental principles of freedom of speech, the press, and the independence of media.

Both nationally and internationally, we are committed to supporting the development of **independent, professional, transparent, and objective media and journalism**; to increasing the resilience of our societies by investing in strengthening critical thinking skills, as well as media and information literacy.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that Latvia remains a strong advocate of the multilateral system and believes in an effective and efficient United Nations, guided by the values on which it was founded. It is time for the UN to adapt to a changing global environment, focus on priorities, and deliver results. The UN Secretary-General cannot do this alone. We all must work together to ensure that our organization functions better and is fit for its purpose.

Thank you.