

**Address by the President of the Republic of Estonia Kersti Kaljulaid
at the 74th United Nations General Assembly**

25.09.2019

Mr President
Mr Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Brothers and sisters,

40 years ago, 40 years after Europe had been divided between those with power, between those who never hesitated to use this power to the benefit of their own nations and detriment of the others – 45 people from the Baltic States sent out an appeal to the United Nations, to the EU and the countries involved. Their appeal – later known as the Baltic Memorandum – carried the hope that multilateral co-operation based on the rule of law can deliver for the small occupied states located between the two global blocks, the liberal democratic world and the Soviet Union.

Just 12 years later, the three Baltic States re-joined the world of free and independent states. This was a victory for democracy and multilateral co-operation.

This year, Estonia celebrates the 40-year anniversary of the Baltic Appeal by taking responsibility we could not even dream about during occupation – becoming an elected member of the Security Council of the United Nations.

We took this responsibility because we care. We care about the weaker and the weakest among states and within societies. We care about those whose voice needs amplification by the multilateral world in order to be heard.

We care about nations facing genocide. We care about their women, their children.

We care about nations facing long term conflicts and suffering from terror. We care about their generations of boys for whom the only known profession is that of a soldier.

We care about nations facing extinction through the slow weapon of mass destruction – the climate catastrophe.

We care about nations facing famine, and famine-induced disturbances due to climate change.

We care about nations depending on this multilateral co-operation, based on the rule of law, which is the United Nations.

We care because we know that true harmony for humankind – never yet achieved – depends on our capability to show compassion for the fate of others.

Multilateralism is nothing but showing compassion for the fate of others.

Compassion was shown to us when we regained our independence and rebuilt our state.

We are ready to return this compassion shown to us, ready to take an elected seat for the period of 2020-2021, behind the most difficult table of international co-operation, the Security Council. We are ready to serve our electorate and all the others, too, as true service for humankind in a multilateral system always demands.

We will talk *with* countries, not just *about* them.

Respect for the international rule of law and the efforts taken by those who preceded us in implementing it will guide our actions, our decisions, our debates.

We have nothing but respect for varied, but sincere positions and opinions on how to resolve the pressing issues we are facing, to support our decision-making. Those steered by compassion for the humankind and compassion for this planet we habit, can rely on Estonia.

The moral authority of the UN as the global carer for humanity is dear to our hearts.

We have a lot of long-standing and painful issues to tackle, like the fate of women and children in conflict zones. But we also have new emerging challenges related to new technologies. Estonia is to this day the world's only digitally transformed nation which runs its government totally online. But many are following us into cybersphere.

New risks to our sovereignty emerge, related to cyber crime and also cyberspace as the new military domain. As Estonia is globally contributing to the leapfrogging efforts based on e-governance, we feel

our responsibility to protect cyberspace as well. Hence, we strive, also in our work in the UN Security Council, towards better application of international law in the digital space.

Estonia has already declared its own intent in applying national and international law where cyberspace is concerned. We invite all nations to do the same, in order to clarify how international law applies in digital sphere.

We support and also actively participate in the reform efforts of the United Nations, lead by Secretary General Antonio Guterres. We want the UN to be ready to lead in the 21st century, fully benefiting from the technological advances of humankind, which have made it much easier for those who are not big and powerful – the majority of the UN Members – to follow and contribute to the UN various bodies and numerous discussions.

We support thematic consolidation of UN actions and a regional focus of the aspirations, like the high-level working group Every Woman, Every Child; or better common management of the UN actions in various countries.

We also support those who say they want to be much more independently responsible, yet supported by the UN in taking the steps towards collective regional approach to long-standing problems – like the African Union.

We participate, both through UNDP, UNICEF and other UN bodies, in resolving global miseries. We also strive to use the development resources of ourselves, leveraged by those of the EU and UN, to suggest state-building based on digital solutions, seeing the potential of internet and mobile access even among the poorest.

It allows the states to provide for their people, starting from registries of population, effortless access to online birth registrations and online learning tools for those whose access to classical schooling is limited by geography, ongoing conflict, social stigma or disability. We see the Internet as a wonderful tool for educating girls globally, offering jobs for women globally, thus reducing global population growth by emancipating women.

We support the thinking that saving our planet is also a civic responsibility of every person. Nowadays and with the help of technology, we can take this responsibility and feel the serious global

effect of the action of each and every one. Like in the second world clean-up day just last Saturday, when for the second year in a row, the civil movement born in Estonia spread to 179 countries and territories – including Antarctica – involved more than 20 million people and still counting.

Encouraged by this, the Estonian start-up sector underwrote a memorandum with global ambition, promising to be climate neutral in all their actions by 2030. They bring some serious market power and also start-up thinking behind the table, including their ability to quickly and globally mobilise masses of people. Sometimes we associate their capability to change our world only with the negative: closed bubbles and an antagonistic debate style, disruption of work patterns and risks to our social service provision through allowing a global jobs market not compatible with our industrial era tax models.

But this capability can also be used to mobilise masses for the good, making a real difference. The pledge to climate neutrality is open to all start-ups and other green-minded companies ready to support grassroots movement to save our planet. Today, a week after initiating the process, the number of signatories has already more than doubled and spread beyond Estonia, now covering more than 70 companies across Europe.

We need these civic movements, among other things, to encourage policymakers that idealism, readiness to act for the benefit of humankind today and the children yet to be born – still exists. That allows us, politicians, to set aside resources for stopping climate change, which will inevitably reach and probably exceed 1% of global GDP.

The main reason why we are not globally efficient in putting into practice the already existing technologies for green energy production, is the fragmentation of our actions. It is an obstacle to global grid development. It is an obstacle to harnessing solar energy for the benefit of us all, even if we know that a surface not exceeding the territory of Spain is all we need to cater for global energy needs. It is an obstacle to making each and every microgrid globally rely on renewables, and developing access to electricity among those who currently have none.

And there is no one but the UN to help us overcome this fragmentation. We welcome yesterday's first global Climate Summit as the sign that the UN is ready for this challenge.

Climate change remains the biggest existential challenge the world is facing. In this light it is disturbing to know that we still keep subsidising trillions of dollars into its source – the fossil fuel industry.

The destructive force of climate change is not evenly distributed around the world. There are places more vulnerable than the others. However, no place on Earth will be untouched and none of us can escape it. Many people across the globe already experience threats with regard to their livelihoods and, indeed, lives.

The Himalayan glaciers are melting at double the rate since the turn of this century, threatening water supplies throughout Central, South and East Asia. Arctic permafrost is melting decades earlier than even worst-case scenarios – threatening to unlock vast amounts of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

Many people in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) live in a constant fear of inundation by rising seas. The situation will only get worse unless we address it now with ambition and urgency. Yet, our efforts and progress are far from enough to avoid obviously adverse effects of this global crisis. A crisis that no country can solve alone.

Security issues related to climate change are further addressed by the Group of Friends on Climate and Security where Estonia also participates.

Science tells us that climate change is unequivocal. It also indicates the best practices to tackle it. Looking for the best solutions, we must also always rely on science. There is a common perception that replacing fossil fuels with biomass is carbon neutral, whereas science has told us that this is not entirely correct. Renewable energy is not necessarily carbon-neutral. In fact, burning wood can actually increase CO₂ emissions and would make it even harder for us to receive climate neutrality goals by mid-century. Instead, it's more efficient to use wood for making products and in this case it's not only carbon-neutral, it's carbon-positive as these products store carbon for their entire lifetime. We in Estonia appreciate this and every 4th wooden house exported in the world is made by Estonians.

Climate change and environmental degradation is one of these few things where we need to share collective responsibility. In this battle we are all on the same side and it is the only way we can win. We have one good example to take with us from the past where our collective effort once paid

off. It was back in 1987 when we agreed to protect the ozone layer by phasing out numerous substances that were responsible for ozone depletion. As a result, the ozone hole in Antarctica has since then been slowly healing.

Next year, we will be celebrating the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. I would encourage us all to take the 12 months to the birthday party as an opportunity to think what we can do both individually and jointly to safeguard and strengthen the UN and multilateralism.

Because the reality is simple – this global, interlinked and globally warming world cannot survive unless our goodwill and good actions can work beyond artificial limitations created by various, and from the viewpoint of humankind as a whole, artificial fragmentations of global society which has hounded us and keeps hounding us.

It is the lack of true multilateralism, true and idealistic thinking for the benefit of humankind as a whole, that keeps undermining the positive effect of our global efforts. We must overcome it. The UN is our tool to overcome it. It has to be sharpened, it has to be supported by new technologies, it has to be connected to civil societies through digital means allowing to join individual efforts to global movements – but it can never be replaced.

Thank you for your attention!