

**Address by H.E. Dr. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga  
President of the Republic of Latvia  
at the 59<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly**

**New York, 22 September 2004**

Mr. President,  
Mr. Secretary General,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish I could begin this discourse on a more optimistic note, but since we last convened here at the UN General Assembly one year ago, many dramatic and disconcerting events have occurred on the world stage. I refer in particular to the indiscriminate and brutal terrorist attacks on civilians all over the world: in Russia, in Spain, in Iraq, in Israel, in Saudi Arabia, in Indonesia and in many other countries.

I refer to the targeting of children and their parents at schools, on buses and in airplanes. I refer to the almost daily bomb blasts on busy city streets, in marketplaces, and in residential apartment buildings. I refer to the sadistic pride and relish with which terrorists have been filming the shootings, throat slashings and decapitations of their victims.

The purposeful torture and killing of civilians is one of the basest forms of human barbarity. It is akin to a crime against humanity, along with ethnic cleansing and genocide. Unfortunately, terrorism is not disappearing from the news headlines of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Instead, terrorism is becoming the principal method of warfare used by disaffected groupings seeking to achieve political ends, and to blackmail national governments. Nothing can justify the use of such means. Any seemingly noble ends can only be discredited by using terrorism to further them.

Frequently countries facing terrorist attacks have been using vastly superior military capabilities to strike hard at real or perceived terrorist targets.

Too often, however, these strikes have had an undesirable side-effect of their own: the further wounding and killing of civilians, and the additional destruction of property. Such strikes have done nothing to diminish the deep-seated feelings of resentment by disaffected populations. The events of the past few years, and indeed of the past few decades, point to the stark and sobering reality that the

military option alone has not been effective in rooting out terrorism, and that terrorism has not been an effective means for achieving political aspirations.

Such never-ending cycles of killing and mounting mutual hostility can only cease once all of the parties involved forsake the use of violence. In the Middle East, Latvia views the Road Map For Peace as the only feasible means for obtaining a cessation of hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians. My country encourages the interested parties to do their utmost to deescalate tensions and resume the peace process.

In Iraq, the US-led coalition forces have handed over power to an interim government, but security problems are hampering the reconstruction of the country and threaten the viability of free and fair elections this coming January. The transition in Iraq will require continued international assistance, and I encourage the UN to assume an active role in this regard.

Afghanistan is due to experience its first ever elections next month. Latvia hopes that this historic event will not be derailed by violent attempts to disrupt the democratic process in that country. Latvia is ready to continue supporting international efforts to provide peace and security in both Afghanistan and in Iraq.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ten years after the human catastrophe in Rwanda, we are again confronted with the systematic rape, torture and killing of civilians in the Darfur region of Sudan. These have occurred on such a wide scale that they might be classifiable as ethnic cleansing and genocide. Latvia welcomes the mediation efforts of the African Union and encourages all parties involved to ensure that no further harm comes to the civilians of the region. My country supports the UN Security Council's resolution of September 18, which urges the Sudanese government to act decisively to stop the violence.

The United Nations faces the prospect of establishing a new UN peacekeeping mission in Sudan, in addition to the 17 field operations already on the ground. During the past few months alone, two new missions were established in Burundi and Haiti, while a third was expanded in Cote d'Ivoire. The

UN's peacekeeping budget for next year may nearly double as a result. Latvia is deeply committed to the United Nations, and to effective multilateralism as a central element of the UN's activities. Latvia believes that the UN must maintain its crucial role in the mediation of international disputes, and that the United Nation's member states must summon the collective political will to support the UN as a truly credible force for peace.

The UN Security Council has been the principal forum for the countries of the world to deliberate together on matters of peace and security. Latvia believes that the Working Group on Security Council Reform must continue its activities and come forth with proposals on how to make the Council more representative of today's political and economic realities, how to provide the Council with greater legitimacy, and how to render it more effective. A serious debate should be continued regarding the enlargement of the number of permanent and non-permanent members of the UN Security Council. Countries like Japan or Germany can and should play an increasingly stronger role in this framework – in view of their substantial contribution to UN activities and commitments.

Proposals for enhancing coordination between the General Assembly, ECOSOC and the Security Council have made little progress. Overlapping mandates and the duplication of efforts continue to reduce the UN's efficiency. The UN's Economic and social programs need to be reformed as well. For example, why are ECOSOC issues reviewed four times a year, when twice a year might be sufficient?

Combined with the restructuring of ECOSOC's functional commissions, such a reduction of redundancy in the review process could free vital financial and human resources for important economic and social development programs in the developing countries.

Latvia recognizes the important role of the United Nations and other international organizations in promoting worldwide development and reducing poverty. Having regained its independence only 13 years ago, Latvia is gradually completing the transition from a receiving to a donor country. Latvia is grateful for the valuable assistance that the United Nations Development Program has provided to the country since 1993, and is pleased that the UNDP has extended its mandate until the end of the year 2005. Although the amount that Latvia is contributing to worldwide development assistance is

not very large, Latvia is committed to allocating no less than one-third of one percent of its gross national product for development aid by the year 2006, as required by all of the European Union's member states.

Latvia's priority areas for development cooperation centre around the promotion of democratic and civil societies, economic development, environmental protection and other issues in the countries neighbouring the European Union, particularly in Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, to some of which Latvia has already provided bilateral technical assistance.

Latvia is eager to reduce the divides between the developed and the developing world. The industrial society into which we were born has been characterized by the heavy machinery and tools that have marked human progress over the last two centuries. Now this society is evolving into an information and knowledge society, with innovation as an important engine. Latvia has been actively involved in the UN's World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and considers it an honour to chair the Preparatory Committee of the second phase of this summit, which will take place in Tunis in November of 2005. The WSIS process should be an integral part of the international community's efforts to eradicate poverty as outlined in the Millennium Development Goals, which will be reviewed periodically until 2015.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although the delegations here today come from many different backgrounds, practice different faiths and speak different languages, all of us in this room share the same desire to make our world a better, cleaner, more peaceful and more prosperous place to live. We share a world view on what it means to be a human, and on the inherent value of each human life. The more we strive to enshrine such values as tolerance, compassion and mutual respect, the more human, and the more humane, our societies will become.