

Statement of H.E. Mr. Artis Pabriks,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia,  
**to the 60<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly,**  
New York, 18 September 2005

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

I would like to begin by congratulating both the founding nations and all those present here today, as we celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations, which can be proud of so many great accomplishments. Since its foundation in 1945, the UN has helped to negotiate an end to over 170 regional conflicts and has deployed more than 35 peace-keeping missions. It is leading international efforts to clear land mines from former zones of warfare. It has provided aid to tens of millions of refugees fleeing war, famine and persecution. It has focused the world's attention on issues of human rights. It provides annual disbursements that amount to 10 billion US dollars per year for various development programs. It has made safe drinking water available to 1.3 billion people during the last

decade. It has helped to eradicate smallpox from the globe, with polio set to follow soon. It has helped to reduce world child mortality rates by half since 1960. It has improved education in the developing countries, where 60% of adults can now read and write. It provides over two million tons of food to victims of emergencies every year. About 30 million people in 36 different countries benefited from such assistance in 2004. And it has hosted a variety of significant events such as the Rio Conference on Environment and Development, which resulted in important treaties on bio-diversity and climate change.

The vast majority of the UN's employees over the years have been guided by a profound sense of duty. I would like to single out those responsible and dedicated workers who provide humanitarian assistance in the poorest regions of the globe, in zones of conflict and in places that have been affected by natural disasters. We should pay tribute to all those who lost their lives in the service of humanity, like the regretted Sergio Vieira de Mello, who was killed while leading the United Nations' work in Iraq. The world needs the United Nations. It needs the UN today as much as it did 60 years ago. We need a United Nations that is more aid more efficient in dealing with global challenges, and able to act effectively to prevent

such horrors as the genocide in Rwanda, the ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, and the ongoing human tragedy in the Darfur region of Sudan. While such values and principles as national sovereignty, non-intervention and self-determination lie at the very core of the relations between the UN's member states, we also have to recognize our collective responsibility to protect innocent civilians from wide-scale abuse and suffering. It is our duty to arrive at a common understanding of this responsibility to protect, so that the international community can act effectively to avert future mass killings and crimes against humanity. I encourage those UN member states that have not yet done so, to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and to support the court's endeavours to bring war criminals to justice.

When the United Nations was created, Latvia was an occupied country and had no say in the rules that govern this organization. It was therefore a particular honour that the President of Latvia was chosen as a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for promoting reforms within the UN during the last six months. I am delighted that in some aspects we have succeeded in reaching a wide consensus, as for instance, on the necessity of creating a Peace-Building Commission. However, we still do not

have a common understanding regarding many other reforms that need to be carried out. It is our shared responsibility to arrive at such an understanding soon.

Mr. President,

As we work to strengthen the United Nations, we should ensure better cooperation and practices and avoid duplication of effort. Latvia strongly supports the decision to establish a Human Rights Council, which recognizes human rights as a priority in the UN's agenda. I therefore encourage the delegations to work with vigour to ensure the smooth transformation of the Human Rights Commission into a Council, and to set the highest standards for its future members. A vital role in the realization of these standards will be played by the High Commissioner for Human Rights. I wish to confirm Latvia's support for the Commissioner and her Office, and welcome the decision to allocate a larger share of the regular UN budget to this important aspect of the UN's work.

Mr. President,

My country fully supports the management reforms of the UN administration that have been put forth by the Secretary General. These reforms would afford the Secretary General greater authority within certain fields of the UN's activities, as well as greater responsibilities. The reforms would also contribute to the transparency and professionalism of the UN Secretariat, which has been justly criticized for serious deficiencies in its work. I am pleased that the UN's leadership is willing to propose viable changes for improving the operations of the Secretariat. It is now up to the member states to arrive at a consensus upon these proposed measures.

Latvia has consistently endorsed the reform of the UN Security Council in order to render it more effective and representative. We believe that the Security Council should be enlarged to incorporate new permanent seats without veto rights. We also believe that permanent members of the Security Council should refrain from using the veto in cases of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This promises to be one of the most difficult issues to resolve, but we should nevertheless not abandon our efforts to reach a feasible accord by the end of this year.

Mr. President,

The Secretary General has highlighted the linkage between security and development. The commitments he outlines are designed to advance the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, which if achieved by the year 2015, would mark a genuine turn of the tide in our common struggle against poverty and disease. The comprehensive package agreed at the G8 Gleneagles summit in July of this year is an important milestone in helping Africa to eradicate extreme poverty, combat AIDS and malaria, and ensure that every child receives a primary education. We must now make sure that what was agreed at Gleneagles, including a doubling of aid by 2010 and the writing off of billions of dollars in debt, will be delivered.

I would also like to highlight the necessity of achieving gender equality, which includes universal access to reproductive health information and services by 2015. This was the central goal of the agreements that were reached at the International Conference on Population and

Development in Cairo in 1994. Our countries must strengthen girls' access to both primary and secondary education, so that they become less subject to early forced marriages and economic exploitation. Girls must be made safe from genital mutilation. Girls and women must be guaranteed sexual and reproductive rights and protection against HIV/AIDS and other diseases. There is no excuse for half a million women dying each year of pregnancy-related causes that are entirely preventable.

The need for continued development concerns almost all regions in the world, including Eastern Europe, which has experienced momentous changes since the fall of the Iron Curtain in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Thirteen years ago, the UNDP established an office in Latvia to facilitate the country's development and improve peoples' lives. Its mandate in Latvia will conclude at the end of this year, and I take this opportunity to express Latvia's gratitude for the invaluable assistance that the UNDP has provided to my country over these 13 years.

Today Latvia, as a full EU member state, has become a net contributor of aid for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. We know that without the promotion of good governance at all levels, sound macro-economic

policies and a concerted fight against corruption, the MDGs will not be reached. Latvia stands ready to share its experience of transition to democratic rule and a free market economy, as it has done and will continue to do with the countries in transition in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. We welcome the initiative of establishing a Democracy Fund to assist all committed countries in their efforts to consolidate democratic political systems.

Recognizing the opportunities that derive from the use of modern technologies in the field of information and communications, Latvia has been actively involved in the preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society, which will be held in Tunis this November. We hope that this summit will provide unprecedented opportunities for strengthening cooperation between governments, civil society and the private sector in promoting the use of information and communication technologies and generating knowledge societies.

Mr. President,

A major step forward is our unequivocal condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations My own



country, Latvia, regained its freedom through peaceful and non-violent means. We triumphed due to our firm belief in historical justice, along with a great deal of persistence, patience, and hope.

Latvia welcomes the Secretary-General's counter-terrorism strategy. We need to arrive at a comprehensive convention on international terrorism, which would provide a legal framework for international cooperation in combating this modern-day scourge of humanity. The war against terrorism will only be won if it is fought while respecting basic human rights and remembering humanistic ethics.

Mr. President,

I express my profound disappointment that we could not achieve any consensus on disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Progress in this area is more urgently needed than ever. I therefore encourage every UN member state to act responsibly and in good faith in the pursuit of these goals.

Mr. President,

Since the previous session of the General Assembly a year ago, the world has experienced natural disasters of an unprecedented scale of destruction. We have just had hurricane Katrina, and are still getting over the terrible tsunami last year in South-East Asia. The hard lessons of those crises must be learned in order to prepare for future emergencies. While there is nothing we can do to prevent earthquakes and tsunamis, scientists have warned us for years that our continued dependence and increasing consumption of fossil fuels is generating greenhouse gas emissions that are causing disruptive climate changes. Unless we diversify our sources of energy, we can expect to see more devastating hurricanes and floods in some parts of the world, along with drought and desertification in others.

Mr. President,

The challenges that our nations face are formidable, and we will only be able to overcome them by working together. As we prepare to implement the decisions we have made at this gathering, I wish us all the foresight and the courage to uphold the higher interest of the common good over narrow, short-term, local concerns. The future of our peoples depends on us.