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**Address by H. E. Dr. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga,
President of the Republic of Latvia,
at the 61st session of the UN General Assembly,
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Madam President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to begin by congratulating the Republic of Montenegro on its recent accession to the United Nations Organization. We fully understand the challenges that you face and wish you every success in the establishment of a secure and prosperous State.

I wish to express our highest appreciation to the President of the General Assembly's 60th Session, Mr Jan Eliasson, for his dedication and skilful leadership during the past year. Now we look forward to working together with the President of *this* session of the General Assembly, Madam Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, and I pledge her Latvia's full support.

A year ago we marked the 60th anniversary of the UN by setting out a far-reaching reform plan to bring the organization closer to the needs of the 21st century. During the past few years, the UN's spectrum of peacekeeping, humanitarian and human rights operations has already increased and reached an unprecedented level. Yet this is still not sufficient to meet the needs of millions of people who urgently require serious help from the United Nations.

There are many global issues that require our urgent and concerted attention. We will only be able to attain the **Millennium Development Goals** and reduce the crushing poverty that is debilitating the lives of billions of people across this planet if we pool our resources and efforts for the common good of humanity. We need to work together to halt the spread of disease and redress the destruction of the global environment.

We can take satisfaction in noting that a number of serious and meaningful measures have already been taken to alleviate the plight of the world's poor. These important steps must be followed up by continued measures to help the world's poorest nations become more self-sufficient. At the same time, the developing countries must do their utmost to implement the practices of good governance, strengthen their institutions and abide by the rule of law and encourage private sector activity.

It is worth emphasizing that the United Nations has been an effective instrument in those countries where the political will has existed to cooperate fully with the UN's programs and proposals for alleviating the **plight of the poor**. At the same time, the efficiency of UN operations has been called into question, and not without reason. More innovative approaches need to be deployed for alleviating poverty and reaching set development objectives. Among these, we should look to the more effective use of information and communication technologies, and a better use of the opportunities provided by the newest technological developments.

I remember the excitement at the Millennium Summit in 2000, when we adopted the **Millennium Declaration**. Progress towards reaching these Millennium Development

Goals, alas, is still unacceptably slow. The statistics on infant mortality and maternal health, among others, remain particularly distressing. Millions of our fellow human beings have no access to clean drinking water, let alone more sophisticated comforts. We cannot remain indifferent when so much needs to be done.

In many parts of the world, the misery brought on by poverty is compounded by such debilitating and mortal diseases as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. While much has already been achieved to control the spread of these afflictions, further partnerships need to be developed with other stakeholders.

Only a few days ago, the member States of the UN concluded a high-level dialogue on international migration and development. The dramatic increase of illegal migration in the past years has placed great stress on the international system for protecting refugees and asylum seekers. The activities of the UNHCR on migration issues should be coordinated with regional cooperation efforts in order to become more effective.

Madam President,

We have had the great misfortune to see terrorism continue as a threat to international peace and security. I welcome therefore the recent agreement on a Global Counter Terrorism Strategy and urge the UN's member States to intensify their efforts to reach a consensus on a Comprehensive Anti-Terrorism Convention.

It is regrettable that we have failed to make any substantial progress over the last year in the area of disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This is a fundamental issue for global peace and security and I encourage all UN member States to demonstrate their willingness to move forward at a faster pace.

The UN also needs to provide a prompt and effective response when armed conflicts arise. We must strive to make UN peacekeeping a more effective and accepted instrument of collective security. Too often in the past, the UN has been unable to prevent genocide and lasting bloodshed: in the Congo, in Rwanda, in the former Yugoslavia and in the Darfur region of Sudan. During the past ten years, the operational activity of the UN in peacekeeping has quadrupled, but this may still not be enough. The demand for rapid action cannot be met through United Nations mechanisms alone, but requires a more effective partnership between the United Nations and regional organizations.

The most recent example of the need for a concerted peacekeeping effort is the tragic sequence of events in Israel and Lebanon this past summer. Peacekeeping can facilitate solutions, but not impose them. In Iraq and in Afghanistan, as well as in the continuing conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians, there will be no durable peace until all parties renounce the use of violence for achieving political aims. A long-lasting settlement requires the political will by all parties in the region to negotiate a viable compromise in good faith, where a secure State of Israel coexists side by side with an independent State of Palestine.

Currently the UN is uniquely positioned to take a leading role in peace building. We expect the recently established **Peacebuilding Commission** to help those countries that are emerging from conflict not to be drawn back into it and hope that the Commission will serve to promote the post-conflict reconstruction and long-term development of regions that have suffered from warfare.

Along with the promotion of peace and security and the alleviation of poverty, the protection of human rights is one of the main missions of the United Nations. The recent creation of the **Human Rights Council** will hopefully enable the UN to respond more promptly and effectively in situations where human rights come under threat. The Human Rights Council needs to provide real leadership to restore trust in the United Nations as a guardian, defender and promoter of this universal value.

However, the effectiveness of the Human Rights Council depends entirely on the political will and conduct of the UN member States. We must work together to ensure that this new institution, in which we have placed such high hopes, truly serves the purpose for which it was created.

Madam President,

During this session, we will face the difficult task of furthering the **reform** of the United Nations. We have to accept that none of the UN's Member States will be able to attain absolutely everything they desire from the reform process. At no point should any of the members view the negotiations for these necessary reforms as a zero-sum game. It **is** possible to arrive at solutions that constitute a win-win situation for everybody. It does take hard work and a lot of patience, but it can be done.

It is natural for different countries to have different priorities and threat perceptions. It is a fact of life. It is precisely for that reason that we need the UN as a central meeting place, where our common interests can be determined and our common plans hammered out in an inclusive and democratic manner. The ongoing reforms of the UN are needed for the benefit and advantage of all of us, without exception.

The international agreements that are reached within the United Nations bear a unique legitimacy, moral weight and political authority. Yet it is no secret that in an organization with nearly 200 Member States, the adoption of decisions can be protracted. Nevertheless, despite the painstakingly slow pace of UN reform to date, there has been some notable progress during the past year. It is vital for the UN to continue striving for more trust and good will among all our nations, for we cannot afford to do otherwise.

There is general agreement that that the time has come for a serious overhaul of the UN's management system. An effective **Secretariat** is crucial for the UN system's ability to adapt to evolving challenges. So far, only the initial steps have been taken in transforming the United Nations into a more efficient and accountable organization. The time has come for meaningful changes and I hope that we will establish tangible results during this 61st session.

The **Mandate Review** is another essential element of the reform process where our aspirations have been higher than the result achieved. Only a fraction of mandates have been classified and the question of what to do with them is still pending. We need to move ahead energetically, bearing in mind that this is not a blind cost-cutting exercise but an ongoing process of feedback needed to improve the effectiveness and quality of the organization's work. Rational use of resources and cost-efficiency will allow us to do more with the resources at the UN's command, without any duplication of effort.

Madam President,

There has been a growing feeling among the UN's Member States of the need for a revitalized and more effective **General Assembly**. I welcome the regular meetings between the Presidents of the GA, the Security Council and ECOSOC in order to achieve maximum complementarity between these main bodies. The Charter provides us with the fundamental guidelines for our work, and we should be guided by it in a spirit of cooperation, not rivalry. It is self-defeating, unproductive and wasteful to invest time and effort into a competition between the main bodies of the UN. Only by rising above such internal divisions can the UN hope to truly fulfill the leading role that it has to play in order to serve the needs of the world community as a whole.

We must also not neglect the reform of the **Security Council**, which needs to be more representative of the state of the world in 2006. While this matter should not overshadow the rest of the reform process, neither can it be indefinitely postponed. Progress on this issue needs to be made, for it would invigorate and give added impetus to the overall reform effort. The Security Council has a central role to play in maintaining international peace and security. If it is to truly function as an effective organ, then it must attain both a stronger capacity and a greater willingness to act in the face of international crises and tensions and find ways of responding more rapidly at the outbreak of armed conflicts.

Madam President,

In this 61st session of the General Assembly, we must make every effort to progress in adjusting the United Nations to the needs and challenges of our times. This will be the last session under the stewardship of Secretary General Kofi **Annan**. During his mandate, Mr. Annan has exhibited outstanding leadership in setting the agenda and establishing a clear vision of the UN's goals. I therefore take this opportunity to thank him for his tireless dedication to the United Nations and for framing and initiating the much-needed reform process. His successor will inherit a vast and complex agenda, which can only be tackled with maximum cooperation and flexibility from all Member States.

The United Nations requires a Secretary General who will be willing to listen to and to respect the views of all, but who will also have the personal courage to push for the necessary, but possibly unpopular decisions, that are needed for the good of the organization as a whole.

A Secretary General must be endowed with leadership, vision, fairness and objectivity. He or she must be a true citizen of the world who can feel the pulse of humanity. He or she must have the passion and commitment to spare no effort in facing up to the most

demanding of challenges. Today the UN is at a crossroads and faces two choices — to address the challenges of the 21st Century through the combined efforts of all its member States, or to gradually lose its influence in the international community.

As many of you are aware, I recently announced my decision to submit my candidacy for the position of the Secretary General of the United Nations. I highly appreciate the confidence placed in me by the UN Secretary General Mr Kofi Annan as he appointed me Special Envoy on UN Reform.

I am personally committed to addressing the challenges posed by the UN reform and promoting human rights, freedom and democracy, including gender equality. While women represent half of the world's population, no woman has ever been at the helm of this organization. I believe that the time has come for a woman to be considered a serious candidate for the position of Secretary General.

It so happens that, as a result of historical events in the 20th century, the Secretary General of the UN has never come from Eastern Europe. Yet this region has a wealth of experience to share about its ability to effect radical changes and achieve progress in a remarkably brief period of time.

Nevertheless, the principle of regional rotation should not be the principal and sole factor in the selection of a candidate. While I deeply respect the candidates who have already been nominated from one part of the world, the selection procedure should not restrict the rights and opportunities of potential candidates from any other part of the world. I hope that the choice made by the Security Council and the General Assembly will be based solely on the candidates' qualifications, personal qualities and vision.

The world needs a strong UN and we as leaders need to build bridges of understanding, if we are to make the UN as strong as it needs to be. We need to keep alive the main goal of the founders of the United Nations, who were determined "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". We owe it to our children who will inherit this planet, to save them also from the scourge of terrorism, of hunger and of disease.

Because of my own personal experience as a child of war and a refugee, having known fear, cold, loss and hunger in my time, I urge world leaders to save every child we can from such experiences. Our common goal is to extend world wide the peace, freedom, and prosperity that so many nations have already achieved. It can be done, it must be done, but it is something that we can only achieve by all of us working together.