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**Address by H. E. Dr. Valdis Zatlers,
President of the Republic of Latvia,
at the 64st session of the UN General Assembly,
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Check against delivery

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen!

I wish to begin by congratulating you, Mr. Treki, on assuming the post of President of the current session of the General Assembly. I pledge you Latvia's full support.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of a unique peaceful demonstration - the **Baltic Way**. On August 23 1989 more than a million people joined their hands in a 600 kilometre long human chain across the three Baltic countries. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This event was dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact between the Stalinist Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. This pact was another cornerstone leading to the World War II and occupation of the three Baltic States.

The Baltic Way served as a powerful symbol of the drive for democracy and freedom of our three States. The importance of the Baltic Way was so substantial that UNESCO added it to the Memory of the World Register. The message of the Baltic Way is very clear: if people and countries truly commit to a common goal, and if they join their efforts, even the most difficult challenge can be met.

If we look at the world of today, we can see that never before has international cooperation been so important. Never before have we faced such a multitude of simultaneous critical challenges of global significance. Many phrases have been coined to describe the most severe problems. "3E crisis" (energy, economy, environment). "3F crisis" (finance, food, fuel). No matter whichever name we use, we must remember that these global issues require urgent and concerted action at the global level.

Mr. President,

Since we met here last year the financial crisis has turned into a **global economic crisis**. It has struck the world with its full strength. Consequences are felt by every state and by every economy. They have an effect on the international policy. It makes us to reconsider internal policies. Along with other countries Latvia has undertaken necessary adjustments to the downturn. We have learned our lessons. I am confident that our economy, as well as confident that the whole global economic system will come out of the crisis stronger than before.

We should use the crisis as a new momentum for looking beyond our individual gains. Therefore we should use the crisis to look at how we can promote an open international trade system. We hope for prompt conclusion of the long overdue Doha Development Agenda round talks.

Development is hard in the times of crisis. Developing countries are particularly severely affected by its negative effects. We are well aware of the risk of jeopardising what has been done in achieving the *Millennium Development Goals*. We must not give up. Latvia honours its commitments towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. President,

Climate change is a global challenge that needs to be tackled at the global level. The UN Summit on Climate Change demonstrated that it is important to reach comprehensive and fair agreement on future global climate policy in Copenhagen conference. This agreement should follow the principle of common but differentiated responsibility. Every country should contribute according to its capabilities but the political will of every nation is what matters most.

Mr. President,

Stability and security situation in a number of regions in the world is of particular concern to the global community. One of them is definitely Afghanistan. Holding the presidential elections in the fragile security situation was a significant achievement by the Afghan people.

It is crucial to pursue balanced international involvement in Afghanistan. This involvement should encompass both– civilian surge and military efforts. We must continue assistance to *Afghanistan and other countries in the region* in order to prevent the threat of festering terrorism. It is important to understand that, the value of local knowledge of situation and regional involvement cannot be overestimated.

We stay committed to rebuilding process of Afghanistan, paying special attention to upgrading infrastructure and strengthening the Afghan economy. Latvia has contributed both in military and civil assistance to the development of Afghanistan.

Mr. President,

Another issue that remains on the topical international agenda is peace and stability in the *Middle East*. The two- state idea will come to reality only when the Israeli Government sincerely works to make it a reality. It will become a sustainable reality only when the Palestinian leaders settle their own differences in the interests of their people.

This year Latvia provided a rehabilitation program for eighteen Palestinian boys and girls. They came to Latvia for the rehabilitation program for traumatized children from the Gaza strip. These children came to overcome the psychological impact of the conflict they had experienced earlier this year.

Mr. President,

Latvia reiterates its firm support to the security and stability of Georgia. It must be based on full respect for the principles of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity recognised by international law. The security situation in and around **Georgia** is still very fragile. We regret that the UN Security Council failed to agree on continuation of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). Unfortunately despite all the efforts by the international community the OSCE was forced to close its mission in Georgia.

This year we have lost two important international instruments for promoting stability and peaceful conflict resolution in Georgia. Latvia strongly believes that the international community should continue to look for a solution. We should work to grant a full and effective UN and OSCE presence in Georgia, including Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Meanwhile it is ever more important to strengthen the only remaining international mission– the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia. It has convincingly proved its pivotal role in stabilization of the situation on the ground.

I would also like to stress the importance of the UNGA resolution on status of internally displaced persons and refugees from the Georgian regions of Abkhazia South Osetia. It is an important show of commitment to fundamental humanitarian principles.

Mr. President,

Choosing leadership is the right and the responsibility of the people. Recently we have witnessed the post- electoral crisis in Iran. We are concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation and the violent crackdowns. If the Iranian government seeks recognition as representing its people, it should respect human rights. If the Iranian government seeks the respect of the international community, it should comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions. By doing so Iran could become a genuine contributor to peace and stability in the whole region.

Mr. President,

Latvia has been steadfast in the global efforts of fighting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We are sure that the 2010 NPT Review Conference will be an important milestone in this process. Latvia is convinced that it will promote the aims of non-proliferation, disarmament and use of nuclear energy ultimately for peaceful purposes.

Mr. President,

This fall we celebrate the **60th anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions**. The character of armed conflict is constantly changing. New challenges, such as terrorism, arise. Still, the Geneva Conventions remain the bedrock of international humanitarian law. Unfortunately, the political will to fully implement the Conventions remains insufficient. Violations of the provisions of these Conventions, as well as norms of human rights law still occur.

Therefore Latvia strongly supports the *International Criminal Court*. It is a mechanism designed to fight impunity and promote compliance with norms of international law. Latvia commends the work of the Court. Latvia invites all States to full cooperation with it. At the World Summit of 2005 the concept of the *Responsibility to protect* was agreed upon. Latvia supports this concept. It is important to work towards its implementation. It would help us to create a world order where inactivity in the face of mass atrocities becomes a thing of the past.

Mr. President,

Three years ago General Assembly decided to establish the **Human Rights Council**. The Human Rights Council has already achieved some results. The Universal Periodic Review mechanism is one of its most notable successes. However, we believe that this process can be further improved to avoid abuse of shortcomings in methodology and practice. The Human Rights Council will undergo a review in 2011. We believe that the Council can become even more credible and effective body for the promotion and protection of human rights

Latvia has a long-standing commitment and experience with promoting human rights. We are ready to share our experience in this area with the international community. Therefore Latvia has put forward its candidacy for the Human Rights Council for the year 2014.

Latvia has always supported the strengthening of the United Nations. The *reform of the Security Council*, aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and legitimacy of its work, is an important part of the overall reform of the UN. The composition of the Security Council must reflect the realities and dynamics of today's world. Latvia welcomes the beginning of intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform and emphasizes the importance of continued progress in this area.

We note with concern that in the time of global recession the *UN budget* is increasing considerably. It is important to prioritize activities and to continue the UN reform. We would also like to see more transparency and budgetary discipline in the process of budget planning and implementation.

Mr. President,

Latvia is a candidate in the next year's elections to the Economic and Social Council. We are willing to share our experience in addressing global challenges. Sustainable development, poverty eradication, implementation of good governance and the rule of law, fundamental freedoms and environmental stability.

Latvia is already building up its expertise on the Functional commissions and activities related to the mandate of ECOSOC. Latvia is an active participant of the UN Forum on Forests, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, Statistical Commission, and Commission on Sustainable Development.

The UN is the only truly universal forum for dialogue and action. All states, big and small, have the responsibility to contribute to a fruitful work of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

Let me assure you that Latvia is ready to work closely with you and all member states to make this 64th session of the General Assembly a successful one.
Thank you, Mr. President.