

Address of the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, at the United Nations General Assembly general debate in New York

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[Egils Levits](#)



Mr President, excellencies, distinguished delegates,

I confirm Latvia's readiness to cooperate constructively with you.

Our agenda is full and still growing. To quote George Orwell: 'Contrary to popular belief, the past was not more eventful than the present.'

Let me focus today on a few fundamental themes.

I

First, the upholding of international law.

International law is the basis for the world peace order established by the United Nations Charter.

At the core of this order is respect for the sovereignty of states and the prohibition of the use of force. Starting a war of aggression is the gravest threat to our world peace order.

Nevertheless, for seven months now Russia has been waging an unprovoked and unjustified war against a sovereign UN Member State – Ukraine.

Let me stress: This is not just a regional security issue. Russia's military aggression against Ukraine threatens global security and stability.

In the 21st century, Russia maintains a 19th-century ideology of imperialism, colonialism and racism.

Russia invaded Georgia in 2008. It illegally annexed Ukraine's Crimea in 2014. It has used increasingly aggressive rhetoric towards other neighbouring countries. These are all manifestations of its imperialistic and colonial ambitions.

Denying another nation's right to exist, promoting the idea of supremacy of Russians and their special missionary role in the world – these are all contemporary expressions of racism.

That is exactly the opposite of what the UN stands for.

Mr President, dear colleagues,

Russia's war in Ukraine has caused a humanitarian disaster. A third of the Ukrainian population has been forced to leave their homes.

Russia is preventing Ukrainian-grown food from reaching the world market. Also, Russia uses its position in the energy market to exert pressure. High energy prices maintain high levels of global inflation, which most dramatically affects the world's most vulnerable populations.

Russia continues to spread false narratives about the cause of the global crisis in food, fuel, and finances. These lies must be overturned. Russia alone is responsible for this crisis!

Mr President,

We, the law-abiding Member States of the UN, are responsible for supporting Ukraine's self-defence and stopping the aggressor.

Russia's ability to finance the war against Ukraine must be limited. Global sanctions in the fields of finance, trade, transport and energy, as well as restrictive measures against individuals and legal entities, must be maintained and strengthened.

Belarus, being equally responsible for enabling Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, is also being sanctioned.

Since the beginning of the war, Latvia has spent over 0.8 % of its GDP on military, economic, financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. We stand with the brave people of Ukraine!

The heroic defence mounted by the people of Ukraine is bringing success. Today we learn that partial mobilization has been declared in Russia, as their once-mighty army is overwhelmed. The 'blitzkrieg' envisaged by President Putin has turned into a long nightmare.

In another sign of desperation, Russia plans to hold illegal referenda in the coming days on the annexation of the occupied territories to the Russian Federation.

This is a blatant contravention of both Ukrainian and international law. Latvia will not recognize the legitimacy of these referenda and their results. I call on the international community to do likewise.

Mr President, dear colleagues,

Impunity means invitation to further crimes.

Therefore, the aggressor must be held accountable.

The International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court have already started proceedings on particular aspects of Russia's war against Ukraine. The European Court of Human Rights has also initiated proceedings.

However, a legal gap remains. No international court has jurisdiction over the main issue – the starting of a war of aggression, the gravest violation of the Charter of United Nations and international law.

Therefore, I call for the establishment of a Special Tribunal.

The main task of the Special Tribunal would be to investigate the responsibility of the Russian state in the crime of aggression.

After the war, Russia will have to pay reparations to Ukraine for damages. The Special Tribunal could be part of an international reparations mechanism.

The Special Tribunal could be established on the basis of a Resolution of the General Assembly, by another international organisation or a group of likeminded states.

II

Mr President,

Let me now turn to sustainable development and climate change issues.

Agenda 2030 is a common road map for overcoming our challenges and creating future-oriented, sustainable and inclusive policies.

This year, Latvia submitted to the UN its second progress report on Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting the areas of education, gender equality, youth participation and international cooperation.

The implementation of the Agenda 2030 is also the overarching goal of Latvia's development cooperation policy.

Over the past 30 years Latvia has developed expertise in democratic processes, good governance, socio-economic changes and gender equality. Good governance, especially strengthening the rule of law and democracy, accounts for more than 40 % of all support provided by Latvia. As a member of the Peacebuilding Commission, we are sharing our expertise on societal resilience.

Joint efforts must also be continued to address the consequences of climate change, including through development cooperation efforts. For example, in Central Asia, Latvia has been working with the promotion of clean technologies.

Particularly related to the protection of the climate is the problem of global justice. Latvia supports the view that the greatest polluters should also bear a greater burden for the protection of the climate. Latvia consequently advocates for more justice and for more solidarity on the global agenda.

III

Mr President,

We are convinced that digitization is one of the most important agents of change. Latvia supports innovative and proven digital solutions that promote the efficiency of public administration, public participation in decision-making and the creation of new economic opportunities.

Let me now highlight security and fundamental rights in the digital space.

The digital space is an integral part of our lives. It has enormous potential to contribute to the sustainable development of

nations. Therefore, we must resist attempts to turn the digital space into a battlefield, where international law is challenged, and basic rights are ignored.

The use of people's data in ways incompatible with human dignity, rights and security must be prevented.

The global Internet must be open, free, reliable and secure!

We support the proposal of the UN Secretary General to agree on a Global Digital Compact, which should reduce the digital gap between developed and developing countries.

Both the COVID-19 pandemic and current geopolitical challenges highlight the need to strengthen the resilience of society by combating disinformation, promoting media literacy and strengthening media freedom.

Accordingly, Latvia is actively preparing for the upcoming 1st Global Media & Information Literacy week. Critical thinking skills build our immunity to disinformation.

IV

Mr President, distinguished delegates,

The aggression by a permanent member of the UN Security Council against another UN Member State undermines the basic principles of the multilateral system that we have been building for decades.

This situation once again confirms that meaningful reform of the UN Security Council is necessary.

As a first-time candidate for the Security Council in the 2025 elections, Latvia takes the responsibilities of membership very seriously. We will strive to make the Security Council more effective, accountable, coherent and transparent. Latvia supports a more just, equitable representation by Member States, notably from Africa.

V

Mr President,

The Baltic states have much to contribute to the work of the UN.

For us, the horrors of war, occupation and harsh rule by a colonial power are within living memory. So is the fight for liberty and restored independence, and the transition to a successful, sustainable economy and the rule of law.

We have no wish to dominate or intimidate anyone. We reject the idea of spheres of influence. As smaller states, we have an existential interest in effective multilateralism.

Therefore, Latvia will continue to contribute to the work of the United Nations in the spirit of optimism and determination.

Thank you!



<https://www.president.lv/en/article/address-president-latvia-egils-levits-united-nations-general-assembly-general-debate-new-york-1>