

Address by the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, at the plenary 'Delivering Justice for All' of the 'Summit for Democracy'

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Prime Minister Rutte, dear participants,

We all know democracy can be a frustrating process in many ways. Yet there are many reasons why it is still the best form of government. One reason, which I will briefly focus on, is justice.

In a democracy, justice is blind. 'One law and one justice for all'. Ideally, our democratically elected politicians write laws, our transparent courts pass fair judgements, our free media hold the first and the second to account. Of course, in real life problems occur, but a grave miscarriage of justice occurs rarely. And if it does, it can be corrected.

In Latvia we guard and appreciate democracy, despite frustrations. Because we know what the alternative is. Soviet occupation is still in living memory. People remember the show trials of dissidents, the widespread corruption, the inhumane treatment in prisons and psychiatric hospitals. The poisonings and mysterious deaths. And, above all, the deportation to prison camps.

Today we see the old Soviet methods coming back in Russia. They are being applied in the occupied parts of Ukraine. We must send a clear and united message to Russia that it will be held accountable! From its leadership to the last soldier. We must try Russia for the crime of aggression and every person accused of war crimes against Ukraine. I call for the creation of an *ad hoc* international tribunal, preferably, under the auspices of the United Nations. This tribunal should try the crime of aggression which Russia is committing now against Ukraine.

Our other neighbour Belarus, too, is living under the burden of dictatorship. Let me commend the democratic opposition of Belarus for its courage.

Colleagues,

In Latvia with restoration of independence we also restored our democratic pre-war Constitution. It is a basis for the democracy and justice we enjoy today in Latvia.

Let me here add that 60 % of our civil servants, 80 % of judges and 90 % of notaries in Latvia are women. Also, almost a third of parliament and almost half of cabinet ministers. It is essential that women play an active part in the democratic and judicial process. Democracy, as Abraham Lincoln said, is 'of the people, by the people, and for the people'. And that means all people, not just half.

In conclusion – as members of the United Nations we have all made a commitment to reach the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Today I want to highlight SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. This goal is about promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Good governance is necessary to achieve the SDGs. And good governance is best achieved through democracy.

Friends, let us lead by example.

Thank you!

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