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Address by H. E. Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of Latvia, at the Warsaw Conference on Combating Terrorism, 6 November 2001

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank President Kwasniewski for his initiative in hosting this historic conference, as well as the people of Poland for the gracious hospitality extended to us here in Warsaw. This significant gathering of heads of State from Central and Eastern Europe is taking place in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks that occurred in the United States on September 11. We grieve together with the people of America at the senseless loss of thousands of lives, and stand united in our determination to combat the scourge of international terrorism with the utmost vigour and resolve.

The organizers of the violent acts of destruction in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania represent a danger to humanity as a whole, for they hold no regard for human life, the greatest gift of all. In a shameless act of blasphemy against Allah, the very God they claimed to worship, the perpetrators of these attacks wilfully sought to extinguish as many human lives as possible, along with their own.

These gratuitous and random acts of violence were directed not only against the United States of America. They represented a direct assault on the very foundations of civilization, as we know it. They undermine the universal and fundamental values that form the basis of any civilized society, namely, the sanctity of human life, the respect of human rights and civil liberties, and the democratic election of State institutions.

The tragic events of September 11th have changed the world forever, and have compelled the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to unite their efforts in a new and intensified struggle against the perpetrators of international terrorism.

In my own country of Latvia, the Cabinet of Ministers approved three weeks ago an Action Plan for Combating Terrorism. Its main thrust is to prevent terrorists from taking advantage of the territory, banking system and other assets in Latvia. The increasingly close cooperation between Latvian security structures, the stricter monitoring of suspicious financial transfers, and the tighter control of strategically significant commodities, are just some of the measures that have been taken to contribute to the international fight against terrorism.

The recent tragedy in the United States vividly showed that in this new age of increased globalisation, no country is immune to the threats of terrorist activity. We have gathered today in Warsaw to express our solidarity with the victims of the September 11th attacks, and to improve the practical preparedness of our countries to defend the common values we share with our Western neighbours.

Now more than ever, the Euro-Atlantic community needs to be strengthened and consolidated through the continued expansion of the European Union and the NATO Alliance. Today, at this summit conference in Warsaw, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe wish to demonstrate that they are ready, willing and able to contribute in a meaningful manner to world security and prosperity.

NATO's secretary general Lord Robertson recently stated that the actions of terrorists have not invalidated NATO's established agenda // If anything, they have enforced the logic of that agenda. We hope that this will be the approach taken by the Allied leaders next year in Prague.

We also hope that the constructive involvement of Russia in the anti-terrorism coalition is motivated not by short-term tactical considerations, but by a serious rethinking of its strategic priorities. Russia should realize that the presence of stable and prosperous EU and NATO member States at its western borders is ultimately in that country's own interests.

Together, our nations face a series of unprecedented challenges. I wish all of us a successful meeting, and hope that through joint endeavours in the worldwide struggle against terrorism such as this one, we shall provide a lasting contribution to international peace and security.