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Address by Her Excellency, Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of Latvia, To the Millennium Assembly of the Organisation of the United Nations, 6 September 2000, New York

Mr. President,

I should like to start by paying tribute to the efforts that Secretary General Kofi Annan has put forth in bringing about positive changes within the Organisation of the United Nations. The Secretary General announced the need for the Organisation to change along with the rest of the world in his inaugural address to this august Assembly four years ago, and has constantly striven to carry out this mandate.

The turn of a new century is an appropriate time for the leaders of all countries to reflect on their common destiny. More specifically, this *Millennium Summit* is an appropriate occasion for an assessment of the efficiency of the United Nations, and for suggestions as to what steps might be needed to improve its functioning and impact.

In my opinion, there has been real progress since Mr. Annans inaugural address, and there have been major improvements in many aspects of the UNs work. For the sake of brevity, I shall not dwell upon the positive achievements, but will turn directly to those issues that still remain to be resolved.

Mr. President,

Globalisation presents a major challenge to the United Nations, involving as it does, all nations almost by definition. The continuing spread of technological and other improvements is providing new opportunities to advance human societies and to create higher living standards across the planet. However, in many countries, poverty and want show little sign of decreasing, and may even be worsened by some aspects of globalisation. Not surprisingly, this has created widespread disaffection against the very process.

The United Nations, as a global and international organisation, can play a major role in ensuring a more equitable distribution of the resources generated through globalisation. It can draw on the unique strengths of its universality and neutrality, and on its established, on-the-ground presence in numerous countries. These strengths allow the UN to make objective assessments of the difficulties in each particular country, and to prescribe remedial courses of action, in partnership with the governments concerned.

However, the plethora of UN bodies with differing mandates has become unwieldy, difficult to manage, and confusing. In some cases, the configuration of the UNs presence does not match the requirements of a particular country. The UN must therefore strengthen its co-ordinating role and streamline its institutions. It must focus on results and on impact. It must develop assistance programmes without competition, overlap or waste.

Mr. President,

The UN must reassess its resource allocation policies, which in some cases have proven most wasteful and ineffective. It is one thing to oppose conditionality. But there should be no objections to stricter accountability and tighter follow-up requirements, thus ensuring that any aid received is well and truly spent on the purposes it had been destined for.

The UN must also reassess its military peacekeeping operations, not all of which have been successful. Recently, 500 UN soldiers were captured and then released by rebel forces in Sierra Leone. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, UN peacekeeping efforts have not attained their objectives. In Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Rwanda, UN peacekeepers became passive witnesses to wide-scale slaughter and atrocities.

There is little purpose in passing peacekeeping resolutions that cannot be implemented. Perhaps we should prepare for worst-case scenarios and arm the UN forces for more muscular peace enforcement, rather than send in lightly armed troops who cannot intervene in serious armed conflict. The Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations contains constructive recommendations that are well worth considering. This is one major issue that will have to be addressed by the Security Council.

Regarding the reform of the Security Council itself, Latvia agrees that such reforms are urgently needed in order to make this important body better reflect existing realities.

Mr. President,

It is my pleasure to announce, that within Latvias modest possibilities, my country has donated a beautiful and fully renovated building in the Old Town of Riga, the capital city, for the use of the UNs organisations in Latvia. As a donor country, Latvia is also increasing its contributions to the United Nations Development Programme, and covering the UNDPs local office costs. In addition, Latvia is once again making a voluntary contribution to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Latvia believes that at the turn of the Millennium, the United Nations member Governments must work seriously to render this Organisation more efficient and effective in the common fight against poverty, war, corruption, lawlessness, torture and in the promotion of human rights. We must concentrate our efforts on transforming the UN into an efficient, problem-solving and development-oriented Organisation that people can truly trust and rely upon.

In conclusion, I wish us all a very useful and productive session.