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Address of H.E., Dr. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, President of Latvia, at the Ceremony honouring military personnel for service in the operational theatres of the Alliance, 29 November, 2006

Monsieur le Secrétaire Général,

Distingués chefs d'État et de gouvernement,

C'est avec fierté que la Lettonie accueille ici, aujourd'hui, le Sommet 2006 de l'OTAN. Pour nous c'est un honneur mais aussi une occasion historique de dire merci à nos partenaires de nous avoir fait confiance, de dire merci aux membres de l'OTAN qui ont eu l'ouverture de cœur et l'ouverture d'esprit d'engager les pays soumis si longtemps au totalitarisme— et de les admettre comme membres à pleine part de cette alliance, qui pendant des décennies a pu assurer la paix et la sécurité en Europe et en Amérique du Nord.

Mr Secretary General,

Distinguished heads of states and governments,

It is with pride that Latvia welcomes you here in this Riga summit. We are grateful for the confidence you have placed in us and for our ability to contribute to an alliance which has been so successful over many decades in ensuring peace and security, stability and democracy for all the countries that are members and that have set for themselves the high goals of supporting and fighting for freedom and democracy.

We, along with our neighbours in Estonia and Lithuania, we, Latvians, know what the lack of freedom means. We know the price of freedom and we have paid dearly for regaining our own. We were fortunate that after many years under the totalitarian rule we could regain our freedom with the singing revolution. It is not always possible, there are times when blood has to be shed in order for freedom to be regained. By joining the Alliance we have declared our commitment to stand firm for the values that were denied us for too long, the values for which our people waited for many decades, the values for which our people now are ready sacrifice their lives.

Freedom is the dearest thing we can have next to life itself, but there are times when lives have to be sacrificed if you want to preserve freedom. All the values that we hold dear cannot be freely cultivated, we cannot benefit from them unless we have our sovereignty, our territorial integrity, and unless our people have a chance to make a choice. All the countries represented around this table now have peoples who have a choice. They determine who governs them, they determine the course of their destiny. I would entreat all those who are seated here that there are still nations who have not reached what we have achieved. There are nations still striving to be ensured the same sort of security, the same sort of freedoms that we now enjoy. We would entreat all our fellow members, the NATO Alliance to remember, to keep an open door and to make sure that all those who are ready to stand and die for the same values as we, have the same opportunities that we in Latvia and all the other countries in Central and Eastern Europe have been able to enjoy thanks to your understanding and thanks to your support. Thank you very much.