



Latvijas Republikas Valsts prezidenta kanceleja Prezidenta preses dienests

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Speech by the President of Latvia Dr.Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga Receiving the Ceres Medal, Rome March 30, 2007 (Transcript)

I feel that it is an award, that is one that my people in Latvia, the country of Latvia, have really earned by the collected effort that they have been able to put forth ever since acquiring their independence again in 1991 after having lost it for a long time.

For many centuries Latvia was an agricultural land, a land of lakes, rivers and forests, where tilling the land and clearing the forest was the first task that a family had to face in establishing a base of survival for themselves and of course, in subsequent centuries also for a variety of neighbouring powers who conquered our land and exacted naturally considerable taxes from the local inhabitants. But I think what the Latvian people learned throughout these difficult centuries is the importance of very hard work - and we have a harsh climate, which, of course, has contributed to that -, the importance of planning ahead, the importance of seizing the opportunity and quite literally. With the kinds of summers we have in Latvia the expression that you have to have to cut the hay while the sun shines is quite literally true: you may have only a few hours available for cutting your hay and making sure that you can preserve it for the winter.

The advantage of my land is that it has been spared the kinds of natural catastrophes that so many other parts of our planet have to suffer from.

It has been for Latvia a truly moving moment to take its seat at the United Nations among all the other nations of the world, to receive for the first years the help, advice and support of the United Nations Development Programmes. And we are very proud of having graduated from that to becoming one of the donor countries. We feel that this could be seen as a sign of encouragement for all those countries that are passing through right at the moment various kinds of difficulties. Our planet, I think, puts forth a variety of challenges to the inhabitants in various parts and in various climates.

What the United Nations and its bodies and the FAO have done is to put in effect the principle of solidarity, the solidarity of richer nations with poorer ones, technologically advanced ones with others still using the technologies that they had used thousands of years ago. I think it is this spirit of universal brotherhood of man, the spirit of solidarity among nations, where each nation by contributing to the common good and to the common programmes can be also ensured should ever the need arise, should ever catastrophes strike them, that they would also be able to receive the support of other nations.

I am, Sir, deeply touched by the honour of receiving this medal. I think the people of Latvia will feel it a signal honour to have their president honoured in this way. But most of all I should like to express my deep appreciation of what under your guidance this organisation, this international body has been able to accomplish. And may I express our sincere wishes that this extremely important work for feeding humanity, for ensuring that every person born on this planet should be able to face up to a life, where they should not have to face thirst and hunger and the lack of the most basic needs, that we can step by step continue working in that direction. And today I am sure it can be done when nowhere do we have anybody left who will have to go hungry.

Thank you for the honour!