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Speech of the President of Latvia, Dr.Vaira Vike-Freiberga, Tällberg Forum 2007 in Sweden, July 2, 2007

Transcript

Your Royal Highness Crown Princess Victoria,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Friends of the Earth and of humanity,

We were discussing today about the difficulties that our planet is facing and facing in the future that is closer than most of us would like to think. And the question, I think, that has been arising in everybody's mind is: what can we do about it?

We have been asking how can we live better together and that means we have to think about what is it in our current behaviour that needs to be changed. And change is never easy, change can be very painful, at the very least it can be tiresome, it can be annoying. I know something about change: I have spent my life on three different continents and in six different countries and it is only relatively recently that I was able to go back to my country and to become its president. And my country Latvia had to go through enormous changes in the very short period of 16 years. So I know that change is necessary. It can be done if you have the will and the determination and the general consensus that it must be done.

And in that sense what we are doing here in Tällberg fund, what you are doing by being here is building consensus. We are building a commitment, we are building a will. And I very much hope that each and everyone as you will go back to your tasks, to your business, to your profession, to your country, each and everyone of you will take with you this sense of commitment, this conviction that change is necessary, if we are, literally, to save our planet, and that each and everyone of us can do something about it. And that to me is the most crucial of all questions.

It was a very interesting remark that we heard just now, about how to mobilise the populations of the world, how to make them conscious of how grave the situation is, how can we get to agree on what truly seems to be a crisis, when some of us have not been convinced as yet?

I recently picked up a novel at an airport to ease away the waiting time and it was by *Michael Bridgeton*, bestselling author and in this book the central theme is that global warming and planet change - it is only a myth, actually it has not been proved, and it shows curves and gaps and so on and there is nothing like a line, these are up and down fluctuations, nothing of the sort has been happening. Then of course, for the sake of the novel and the entertainment and the plot of the story, it is the environmentalists who are the bad guys and they are the ones who are to destroy the world and they are ready to do any sorts of harmful things to hold business as usual from proceeding along. It makes an interesting story, but I do fear, not quite a true one. The ill doers in the story -, in every story we need the good guys and the bad guys, we had that ever since the old sagas and the folk tales.

We had a little bit of a drama earlier today when Bo was playing the bad guy, the stupid representative of *homo sapiens*, who was actually quite a bad guy and then we have

mother nature in all her bounty and her goodness and here is lasting humanity hurting mother nature.

But when you think of it: in the early stages of our species, frankly there was poor little humanity trying to survive in the world, where mother nature was web of tooth and claw, where man had to fight against sabre teeth of tigers and parasites and bacteria and viruses, chewing away at man just as much as man was killing the animals to survive and felling down trees in order to build shelter for himself.

In nature everything is a change. Everything is transformed.

Remember the old Antoine Laurent Lavoisier phrase that nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is changed. And if we complete this change by building something else, by destroying something else, the very first creatures in the primeval soup when life was born were the ones who were a bunch of molecules bunched together and formed an entity that would chew up other molecules and propagate themselves. That is how nature is. And we as it happens are part of it. We are not outside the nature, we are not above the nature, we are part of it. Something does set us apart, and that is our consciousness. We are conscious and it is conscious minds. Of course, we have been able to introduce elements into the balance and the equilibrium of our planet, that are very threatening - not to the planet - she does not care, she really does not care! - but it is threatening to us, to *homo sapiens*, to us and the survival of our species. Because our planet - you can ask scientists who know about it - has been changing.

We heard about change earlier today. There have been incredible, unimaginable changes all over the millions and billions of years since this planet came into existence. It has been changing incessantly. And it is only a little blink of an eye of its lifetime that life appeared on earth and that conscious human beings appeared on earth. Of course, when I say that, I am being anthropocentric. Maybe stones are conscious, too, and flowers and trees. We like to think that we are the only ones who are conscious in the sense that we can communicate and see that others are conscious in the same way that we are.

In this natural world the planet will continue changing, it has also its own lifetime. There is a Latvian folksong. It says about the lifetime of the sun and the lifetime of a human being, the lifetime of the sun is just a longer one. The planet has a lifetime as well. It will be way longer than that of any one of us. It will be way longer than possibly that of the human species.

So when we are concerned about what is happening to the planet, we actually are being very selfish, we are wishing to continue living in equilibrium with that planet. It is our home, it is our only home, there is no other one, this blue planet, which actually looks green when you look around here, but it looks red or yellow or grey in many other parts, it looks white and snowy elsewhere. This planet is our home. And so we have to live in equilibrium with it and in equilibrium with the other parts of nature and the other creatures that form part of that nature. And if we have been clever enough to keep improving - as we heard earlier today - our standard of living. Yes, we not only live better than our parents. I think we are living today better than any generations before us, except possibly the nobility of certain societies like the Romans who had slaves running around and doing their bidding, but even they with all their slaves, I am not sure, that they had comforts that the ordinary regular worker in a Western technological world can enjoy in the terms of sheer physical comfort. So we have it all now, we owe it to science.

When Francis Bacon in the *Novum Organum* set out the principles of modern science, he did not mean to rape nature when he said that we have to torture her to find out what she has to say. What Francis Bacon meant is that we should study nature and it is very clearly stated in the statement of the Royal Society of Great Britain that the nature, the understanding of nature is meant for the betterment of man. Science and technology only started up because we wanted the betterment of man. But of course, at that time the betterment of man was able to go on without doing such a ghastly and amazing damage to

the planet. What has happened since: there has been rather more of human beings on this Earth. And the question then is: is this planet able to sustain as many human beings as keep accumulating decade by decade. The growth of this population, it has certain limitations, grown has limitations that is a question.

And then about its resources, how do we use them? Are we going to use them wisely? Our technologies are not going to be stuck where they are today, because they are profitable and they are comfortable and some of us have more and others have less. Or are we really going to push for innovation? Are we going to push for new forms of energy, for new forms of interacting with the environment, new forms of living together socially? And this living together is not just about carbon emissions and it is not just about fossil fuels or bio-fuels. It is first about us, the human beings being able to live together. I think that is our most severe and fundamental problem.

And yes, we had that thought too today about the human sciences, the social sciences, being not nearly as advanced as the natural sciences. We have made fantastic strides in biology in physics and in chemistry. In psychology, in our own field, frankly, ever since its creation at the end of the nineteenth century we have not come very far and it is more by intuition, for instance, as a practical psychologist, I could say that my best diagnosis that I ever did were those I did by intuition rather than by scientific tests. Same that the politicians in the world today, I think, have to work things out by the seat of their pants, there are no recipes, there are no formula, there are no paradigms for good governance. We have accumulated certain systems of laws, regulations, the *acquis communautaire* of the European Union and then there is the Constitution of the United States of America, etc. But we are really a long way to go in order to develop humanity, civilisation and the capacity to live together.

In this season of Midsummer, which in these Nordic parts, in Sweden and in my native country Latvia, is the time of celebration, because it is the victory of light over darkness, the sun remains in the sky for such a long time, whereas in the winter we see so precious little of it. We in Latvia celebrate, if not by the lovely maples we see here, but we bring up buckets of fire on hilltops. And the idea is that these fires should echo each other from village to village and that the light should be spread all over the country. I think in terms of understanding and in terms of the light, science, politics, good governance, the best that human nature and the tradition has invent - we have to share it, we have to put it together and make sure that it generates both heat and the light, that it does not burn and does not destroy.

Since we had such a success last year in actually having a powder course, I thought that we have not had a musical interlude this year, as opposed to last year, it was quite a long time. I would like to teach you all a Latvian folksong - after all, we did it quite well last year. The song is about gathering together. Here we are in this big tent, gathered together from the four corners of the Earth, and, yes, we do want to talk to each other, both across the East-West and the North-South divide. And the song very symbolically is about young children, shepherds, who are brought out to pasture. And it says: let us climb on the hillside to sing, so that our voice can be heard further away. I hope that your voices, not just your singing voices which you test out in a few moments, but your voices in terms of your thought and powers of persuasion and your powers of conviction, will carry on and will be heard way along these hills and way along these dales, that they will be heard all over the world, all over the planet and that they will make a difference.

But now it is time to learn to sing in Latvian.

There are certain linguistic forms of expression that are, I think, easy to acquire and that, I think, work internationally. And what you will have to sing are the following words, is almost as complicated as the texts that you get in the popular music. And what you have to sing is this: lalala-lalala-la-la-la-la-LA!

Let us sing.

*Dzeniet šurpu, ciema gani,
lalala-lalala-la-la-la-la-LA!*

Še ir laba ganībiņa.

lalala-lalala-la-la-la-la-LA!

Še aug kuplis āboliņis,

lalala-lalala-la-la-la-la-LA!

Sarkaniem ī ziedīņiem.

lalala-lalala-la-la-la-la-LA!

Uz cintiņa dziedāt gāju,

lalala-lalala-la-la-la-la-LA!

uz akmeņa gaviļēt.

lalala-lalala-la-la-la-la-LA!

Let your voices in Europe be as harmonious, as the Tällberg chorus was here this evening!

Thank you everyone!