

25 September 2013 – In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly today, the President of Estonia highlighted the use of modern information and communication technologies (ICT) to drive development and the importance of international law to preserve Internet freedom while protecting citizens from cyber crime.

"The main driver of sustainable development is inclusive and responsible policies in economics," President Toomas Hendrik Ilves told the General Debate of the Assembly's 68th session.

Mr. Ilves added that modern ICT solutions are a key enabler to foster such growth, leading to better governance, access to public services, job creation, transparency, accountability and civil society participation.

In his statement, he stressed that cyber security and internet freedom "are intrinsically linked and in no way incompatible."

"Freedom of opinion and expression - online or off - is a cornerstone of every democracy and constitutes a fundamental human right," Mr. Ilves continued. He added that the UN Group of Government Experts affirmed that international law is essential in promoting an "open, secure and accessible cyberspace."

He joins scores of world leaders and high-level Government officials in New York who will, over the next five days, present their views and comments on issues of individual national and international relevance. Delegations are focusing on a global development agenda for the period following 2015, the deadline for achieving the eight anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

"The targets should leave no one behind and be applicable and achievable in every country," Mr. Ilves said, stressing the importance of women and girls as main drivers of development.

He also noted the importance of education, decent job opportunities and essential health services, to the agenda, as well as the inclusion of topics particularly relevant to people with disabilities who have been "one of the most excluded segments of our societies."

Turning to the crisis in Syria, Mr. Ilves said that the use of chemical weapons is "unacceptable under any circumstances and requires complete and unreserved condemnation," and urged the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Security Council to move forward to destroy and verify the weapons.

The President also noted that Estonia was among the countries to join an initiative in January asking the Security Council to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

In contrast, Mr. Ilves praised the presidential elections in Mali which have "paved the way for optimism," and reiterated Estonia's support in rebuilding the country.

Mr. Ilves also said the future looks promising in Afghanistan where "responsibility and ownership make people masters of their own fate."

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