

"Today, in too many parts of the world, we find a conflict either emerging, raging or frozen. Just as we need international law [to cope with conflicts], we also need the mechanisms to enforce it. Unless the UN starts to do more, it will, in time, lose its relevance," said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves last night in his address at the General Debate of the 71st United Nations General Assembly.

President Ilves emphasised that the primary criticism directed at the UN today is based on the Security Council's lack of ability – or willingness – to respond to major crises. According to the President, the UN should be the first place to come to for a solution when we face a global challenge. "This should not be the last resort when all other options have been exhausted," stated the Estonian Head of State.

He stated in his address that the world was more stable ten years ago, when he took office as President: "This was before the economic crisis, the migration crisis, current conflicts in the wider Middle East or Russia's aggression against Georgia and Ukraine. The issues discussed then included terrorism, migration, climate change and cyber security, and were largely the same; only the urgency we sense has ratcheted up."

According to the Estonian Head of State, not all of today's conflicts and crises could have been prevented.

"Yet I am sure that the effect of many could have been mitigated had we acted sooner, had the proper mechanisms to resolve them been in place," emphasised President Ilves and he recalled that when he addressed the UN assembly in the wake of Russia's invasion in Georgia in 2008, he warned it not to apply international law selectively.

"International law had been clearly violated by Russia's invasion into Georgia. Six years later, in 2014, we saw a repeat performance in Ukraine. For the first time since World War II, borders in Europe had been changed through use of force. The provisions of the UN Charter were blatantly violated and yet the UN could not make a difference," said President Ilves.

"Russia's aggression in Ukraine continues. Territories of Ukraine and Georgia remain occupied

by a foreign military, while frozen conflicts remain in Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria," he added.

In his address, President Ilves also mentioned the migration problem that is affecting the world in general, and he emphasised that this is a common challenge for all countries.

"Migrant children are at the heart of the migration influx. Children on the move or otherwise affected by migration are by far the most vulnerable group," said the Estonian Head of State. According to the President, one significant challenge is to provide education to children in refugee camps. Depriving education will damage the prospects of refugee and asylum-seeking children, leave them behind and, at the same time, increase the risk of alienation.

In his address, President Ilves also mentioned the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, which were adopted by countries last year, and he stated that Estonia attaches great importance to the goal of achieving gender equality, which will grant all people equal opportunities, regardless of their gender.

He also invited the international community to promptly implement the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists, describing the right to freedom of opinion and expression as equally important online and in the analogue world.

Full text of the address by President Ilves in English is available at the following link: <https://www.president.ee/en/official-duties/speeches/12557-address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-estonia-toomas-hendrik-ilves-at-the-general-debate-of-the-71st-united-nations-general-assembly/index.html>

You can watch the video of the address by President Toomas Hendrik Ilves in English at the following link: <http://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/1714/1714294/>

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