

“Today’s non-governmental organizations, the modern-day counterparts to the choirs and societies of their day, are dealing with home decoration, as well as hometown and home-village promotion. Also, increasingly with joint voluntary activities in the interests of a cleaner living environment, and with helping those who cannot help themselves,” President Toomas Hendrik Ilves said today at the Civil Society Conference in Tallinn, bringing as examples Maarja Küla, Neighborhood Watch, the extinguishing of forest fires, elimination of sea pollution, planting of trees in the spring of 2004, and the national forest clean-up to take place on May 3, 2008, at the initiative and participation of hundreds of thousands of citizens.

“What should the role of the state be in respect to the third sector? The State must first and foremost be an understanding and altruistic partner and create a good environment,” said the Estonian Head of State.

“The state is not the wise leader of civil society. Local governments, political parties and politicians must not harness the citizenry’s initiatives for their purposes. No one has the right to make the possibilities for voluntary activity dependent upon getting some service in return,” President Ilves stressed. “The state must not abuse the initiative and heartache of its citizens. If in September a grandparents’ organization in Tallinn came out to help schoolchildren safely cross the streets, this does not mean that concerned grandparents are to be the only ones concerned with traffic safety.”

“Instead of looking for scapegoats and shifting responsibility among various authorities, in the future, the state itself must immediately take action to help clean seawater and save birds that are in trouble,” said the President, adding “if every year thousands of our compatriots demonstrate their compassion and donate millions of kroons to children’s hospitals, our government still bears the responsibility for ensuring that our hospitals have the necessary medical instruments and equipment.”

Office of the President
Public Relations Department
Phone +372 631 6229