

Speaking on behalf of Estonia at the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves focused on three topics: the development objectives for the millennium and the possibilities for achieving them; natural catastrophes and catastrophe aid; and the war between Russia and Georgia.

The Estonian Head of State asked what the recent Russian-Georgian conflict means to us, to the United Nations.

President Ilves is of the opinion that it is extremely regrettable that the basic principles of the United Nations, which are enshrined in the Charter of the UN—like the unlawfulness of threatening or using aggression against the territorial sovereignty of another country—have been so brutally violated.

“Therefore, we are totally within our rights to demand and guarantee that the UN have the capacity to convince one member state to withdraw its forces from the territory of another sovereign member state and to end its aggression,” the Estonian Head of State said. “The capacity of the UN to fulfill the expectations placed on it should not depend on whether the given member state decides to base its activities on the good practices of international law or not. Otherwise, the *raison d’être* of the UN, the meaning of its existence, disappears.”

According to President Ilves, we cannot allow the provisions of international law to be observed selectively or only when they are suitable, because, in that case there no longer is any international law.

“Russia’s behavior in the weeks following the cessation of combat activities shows that, unfortunately, even in the first decade of the 21st century, it is possible to refuse to honor international treaties, to interpret them at one’s discretion, and only observe international laws when it serves one’s purposes. At the same time, a permanent member of the Security Council should observe the provisions of the UN Charter with conviction, the Estonian Head of State said. “This forces us once again to recognize that in the interests of international community it is essential to intensify the capacity of the UN to regulate and resolve conflicts. In the light of recent events, it has become entirely clear that it is important to continue the reformation of the Security Council.”

In connection with the Russian-Georgian conflict, President Ilves recalled that Georgia has also been hit by cyber attacks, which are a wider international problem—this is truly a form of aggression that no country can combat on its own.

The Estonian Head of State called upon the UN member states to view the risks related to cyber security with the utmost seriousness and affirmed that Estonia, which has comprehensive experience in fending off cyber attacks, is ready to make a proficient contribution to the prevention of this new form of warfare.

Speaking of developmental aid, President Ilves stressed, “Firstly, each state is responsible for its own development. Thus, in order to guarantee steady development, developing countries must strengthen their administrative capacities and infrastructure, intensify their battle against corruption and set their economic environments in order. This is the only way to create suitable conditions for the effective receipt of development aid and the more efficient use of the received assistance.”

If the beneficiaries have high levels of corruption, inept administrative systems and inflexible economic climates, it is difficult for the donor states to expect public opinion to support increased developmental aid, the Estonian Head of State said. At the same time he considered it important that donor states and organization increase the effectiveness of their developmental aid by coordinating and harmonizing activities related to developmental cooperation.

In the case of humanitarian catastrophes—whether they are disasters caused by nature or people—it is vitally important that help arrive at the scene of the disaster as soon as possible, and that the access of humanitarian aid experts be guaranteed regardless of their nationality or which country or organization they represent, President Ilves said. He added, “Unfortunately, recently several incidents have occurred where countries have only allowed aid from foreign countries onto their territories under severely restricted conditions. It is the weakest and most vulnerable victims that suffer the most if such policies are enforced.”

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