

Allied relations with its NATO partners are important for Estonia; on foreign missions, the support of the local population is important; the state must take care of the soldiers on foreign missions; and support from their families sustains the soldiers who are serving far from home—these were the basic messages delivered by President Toomas Hendrik Ilves at the meeting with the members of the ESTCOY-7 Infantry Company leaving for Afghanistan, and their family members.

“In Estonia, we have always believed that fulfilling our allied commitments is the best guarantee that our allies will fulfill their commitments to us, when we need help,” the Head of State said. “In the current situation, when we know how important NATO, and the support of our NATO allies, is to our national defence, your participation in the NATO mission in Afghanistan is even more important, shoulder-to-shoulder with the officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers of our partners.”

President Ilves acknowledged the bravery and valor of the members of the Defence Forces that have served on dangerous foreign missions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Speaking of foreign missions more broadly, he said, “We need socially mature and intelligent soldiers. This also means understanding and respecting the customs of the local populations. Not everyone is Taliban; this is the first thing to remember. Without the support of the local population, we will not succeed in Afghanistan. This support must be created, cultivated and maintained. After all, NATO is in Afghanistan in order to make this country safer and to provide more security for the surrounding world, as well as for the Afghans themselves.”

The Head of State also spoke about the state’s support for the members of the Defence Forces on foreign missions and their families, recalling that draft legislation that originated in the Ministry of Defence, and has already arrived in the Riigikogu, should increase the social guarantees for soldiers who are wounded on foreign missions and for the families of those who are killed on missions.

“I also acknowledge the parliamentary National Defence Committee, which is dealing seriously with this draft legislation and will possibly make it even stronger,” President Ilves said. “This is all essential in order for the state to fulfill its moral obligation to the men and women that this same state sends on dangerous foreign missions on behalf of itself and its allies. The state

must be caring toward the members of the Defence Forces serving on foreign missions, and especially caring when war cruelly robs a young person of his or her health or even life. In very direct terms—the members of the Defence Forces going on foreign missions should not have to worry about what happens if... They must know that the state will not leave them or their families stranded.”

The Head of State also addressed the families of the soldier serving on foreign missions, saying, “The strength of every unit is equivalent to the strength of the soldiers’ families.”

The soldier, non-commissioned officer, or officer who knows that everything is fine at home and that those close to him or her are able and willing to wait patiently is stronger because of this knowledge; the support of one’s family adds strength, especially to soldiers on foreign missions, President Ilves said.

“I appreciate that this is not an easy task for your families and intimates. Moreover, I am sure that the members of the Defence Forces really need your support, faith and willingness to wait,” the Head of State said.

President Ilves addressed the soldiers, saying that they should trust their superiors, and he addressed the officers, saying that they should be decisive, inventive, smart, mature and fair.

“Keep up your team spirit. Protect each other. The daily battle cry of “Go! I’ll cover you!” should guide your thoughts and actions the entire time that you are serving in Afghanistan,” the Head of State said, wishing those leaving for Afghanistan strength and a soldier’s luck.

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