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We often forget, however, or perhaps do not even know, that the first song festival back in 1869 was held to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the abolition of serfdom.

This means that only 190 years ago we were serfs. We were, literally, enslaved.

Priius, as we called the liberation from serfdom, was the first step taken by Estonians on our way to becoming free.

And this road took us longer than a century. It was a painful road.

We still lacked liberty at the beginning of the last century. We lacked the freedom to speak, to write and to sing about the things for which our souls cried out.

We lacked the right to be educated in our native language and to elect our own government.

We were not allowed to think as we wanted. We lacked the right to lead complete lives and to

Speak our own language.

Our ancestors had to fight for the very liberties we take for granted today. They had to go to war; they faced and met death and disablement.

In Võnnu, 90 years ago, our forefathers saved the Estonian nation and again six months later at the Eastern Front. They won for us the right to exist and to live in our own country.

Had our forefathers and mothers lost back then, we would have shared the Stalinist horrors in the decades preceding World War II.

Let us think of the fate of our compatriots in the Soviet Union of that era. Let us think of the fate of the Ingrians, our fellow Finno-Ugrians.

Would we be standing here today? Would we be speaking Estonian?

Would we enjoy the opportunity – nay, the freedom – to criticise our government and disagree with its choices, political or aesthetic?

This is why every Estonian should understand the meaning and importance of the War of Liberation.

This, literally, was a war for freedom.

Freedom can be chiselled into stone and glass, words and songs. However, in doing so we should always remember that freedom is not cheap, for free, or for nothing.

This is why I invite everybody tomorrow to take flowers to the closest Monument to the War of Independence in your parish, in your neighbourhood.

Only then will we understand that the men and women who brought freedom to the people of Estonia came from the very soil, the very place, you come from yourself.

This is how we will commemorate the men and women to whom we must be grateful that 20 years ago there were enough of us left to restore our independence.

Take a moment then, today and tomorrow, and consider what freedom means for you, personally.

And give thanks, in your thoughts, to those who brought you freedom.

Thank you.

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