

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who spoke today at the formal ceremony marking the 20th anniversary of the Estonian Union for People with Physical Disabilities, acknowledged everybody whose mobility is impaired, but who nevertheless wants to, and does, actively participate in society, and is brave enough not to be confined by the four walls of their homes.

The Head of State considered it important that every local government, every respectable company, and every government agency in Estonia would also think about how people in wheelchairs can get around as easily as possible.

“You are the ones who are most aware of how physically disabled people are disregarded or ignored in many places,” President Ilves said. “These are Soviet-era attitudes, when it was believed that those with mobility problems should just shut themselves away in their apartments or houses.”

As the President of the Republic, he affirmed that such an attitude is unconstitutional — paragraph 28 of the Constitution states categorically that disabled people are under the special care of the national and local governments.

“The strength, caring, as well as worthiness of European society is demonstrated by how people with physical disabilities are treated. The extent to which we guarantee their freedom of mobility, which in turn expands their freedom of communication,” the Head of State said.

President Ilves encouraged physically disabled people to exercise their civil rights and make sure that they are treated exactly like other members of society.

“Indeed, exercise your rights to ensure that the government agencies, local governments and private companies that are ignoring you start paying attention to you. This is my plea and challenge to you henceforth,” the Head of State said.

President Ilves recalled Tauno Viljat, who became physically disabled as a young man as the

result of a work accident, but who was able to overcome depression and despair. He even learned to climb five flights of stairs in a wheelchair, and later said that one needs faith and physical training — if one believes and works out, something can be achieved.

“This is same belief and will that I wish for you all,” the Head of State said.

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