

“The Carolin Illenzeer Foundation serves as a sign of strengthening civilian society in Estonia, of us as people being more caring and taking more notice of each other. The knowledge that society will care for the families of defence force members who have died, were killed or seriously wounded in operations abroad, and will provide for them and help their children to obtain a good education, will give security to those who have taken up protecting Estonia as a profession,” said President Ilves at a charity dinner organised by the Carolin Illenzeer Foundation.

The purpose of the foundation, which was established earlier this year as a charity fund, is to support the children of Estonian defence force members, who were killed in action, have died or have been seriously injured. Donations will be used to cover the educational costs and hobby activities of the children of such servicemen. Carolin Illenzeer, whose name was used as the title for the foundation, is the daughter of a Senior Warrant Officer, Arre Illenzeer, who was killed in 2004 in Iraq. Carolin’s father saw her just once, when he came home for a short break from the mission. The Foundation was established by the Estonian Atlantic Treaty Association, the Estonian Reserve Officers’ Association and OSMITH, an organisation that brings together Christian officers.

10 of our soldiers have been killed and 25 badly wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. 36 children are being raised in their families and the families of Defence Force members in Estonia, whose fathers were among these casualties.

According to President Ilves, the state must give our service men assurance and security that they have the best possible equipment and weapons, strong armoured vehicles, good observation equipment, ground radars, and efficient shrapnel vests. But having the knowledge that no one will be left behind when under attack on the battlefield in Afghanistan or later, at home, where the young men and women have to learn to live again after being badly wounded or cope with post-combat stress, is also important.

“The Defence Force members must have the opportunity to be certain that should something happen, the state will not forget them or their next of kin. By this, I mean social securities, which will obviously never be good enough to require no more improvement,” said the Head of State.

According to the President, the public in general can discuss the political expedience and

purpose of foreign missions and question them at parliamentary discussions or in feature stories: “This is the democratic freedom of expression, which I will respect even though I never doubt, not even for a second, that our soldiers are fighting for the right cause. But regardless of all the possible domestic political discussions, the Estonian Defence Force members must have the support of all Estonia – the state and its people.”

The strength of each soldier depends on the strength of its rear, reminded President Ilves.

“Our soldiers are strong. But even the strongest iron may suffer from fatigue or break. Our soldiers will then need support. And those who are protecting also need protection,” the Head of State said. “This is not only how it works with the men and women who have fought in operations abroad. In the very same way, the defence force members who are serving within the borders of Estonia also need support and understanding from all of us.”

Therefore, according to President Ilves, aside from the state the support, public understanding, which only we, each of us, can offer, is of equal importance.

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