

"And take it from the Estonians; it takes hard work. "Regime change" is not enough. That is the quick, and deceptively often, the easy part. Everything else that we consider to be the essence of creating a democracy: institution building, establishment of rule of law, development of civic society, fundamental rights and freedoms, economic growth, low corruption, has turned out to take years and a lot of effort and political capital and will," told President Ilves yesterday in Washington in his keynote speech at the Freedom House Annual Awards Dinner.

President Ilves focused in his speech on defining the core values of freedom and democracy, expressing his regret about some states that assume some societies do not need freedom of speech or free and fair elections. According to the Estonian Head of State, the foundations of freedom and democracy are universal.

According to President Ilves, there was firstly a sense of déjà vu in the post-communist world in response to the popular rebellions against authoritarian rule in Northern Africa and the Arab world. "The feeling of now or never, the sense that at long last there is a chance to throw off the stagnant and thuggish rule that has held us back or been on our back for decades," he told.

"Then, however, comes the shock at having suddenly to take over responsibility for running the country. Mail needs to be delivered, healthcare managed, payrolls met. This is where freedom so often fails. Because freedom ultimately is rather boring, in some ways even psychologically distressing. It's about work, it's about doing things yourself, without having the benefit of a despot to blame for the way things are run or the fact that the weather is bad. This is one of the causes of the failure of so many revolutions: the fear of responsibility," stated the Estonian Head of State.

President Ilves concluded his speech by stressing the importance of ensuring the global freedom of the Internet. "Authoritarian regimes fear the West is attempting to orchestrate an Arab Spring or an Orange Revolution. This is why illiberal states want to develop new regulations for the Internet," recognised President Ilves.

The Estonian Head of State noted that at the International Telecommunications Union's (ITU) conference that is to take place in Dubai in December, the authoritarians will again present proposals that would undermine the current multi-stakeholder model of the Internet, replacing it with a scheme that would allow them to expand their control over their own populations and

economies and extend their control to undermining the freedom and openness we value today. "They will claim that sovereignty in cyberspace is necessary to rein in cyber-crime and cyber-terrorism, but in fact they're using such pretences to disable the freedom of their citizens," said President Ilves, adding that Estonia is against any attempts to restrict freedom of expression.

President Ilves was invited to be a keynote speaker at the Freedom House Annual Awards Dinner by the Chairman of the Freedom House Board of Trustees, William H. Taft IV, and President David J. Kramer. "Estonia has supported democratic rule and human rights both in its own country and elsewhere since it gained independence and has always been among the first to participate in studies and research focusing on civil rights and democracy," they wrote in their address to President Ilves.

Since its establishment in 1941, Freedom House has stood for democratic values all over the world. Freedom House, with Eleanor Roosevelt and Wendell Willkie as its first honorary co-chairs, has spoken out for seventy years against unfair regimes, defended civil liberties both in the USA and all over the world, and supported those fighting for fundamental human rights.

Freedom House Annual Awards Dinner pays homage to those who have committed their lives to fighting for freedom and human rights. This year, the Freedom Award will be presented to Bahrain human rights campaigner, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, currently sentenced to prison, and to his daughters, Maryam and Zainab for their bold stand against authoritarian repressions in their homeland. In addition, the Leadership Award will be presented to Senator Patrick Leahy, who has championed the principles of the USA that promote the protection of human rights and democratic values for years.

Read the full speech [here](#) .

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