

The President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, handed over the decorations of the Republic of Estonia today on the eve of the Independence Day in Theatre Endla, Pärnu.

Here follows the speech given by the Head of State at the awarding of the decorations:

"Honoured cavaliers of the decorations and your next of kin.

Estonians are known for not being over-generous with praise and feeling a bit awkward when being praised in person. I have experienced this year after year when handing over the decorations of the Republic of Estonia at the eve of Independence Day. There are always some people who say that they have no idea what they have done to deserve the highest praise that the Republic of Estonia may give or why they were chosen to be acknowledged.

The answer is simple: this is a decoration awarded for your everyday commitment, hard work, vocation, persistence and often also for bravery.

Often, this is acknowledgement of a team, enterprise or institution, while also being personal recognition for the recipient of the decoration, who has been able to form a strong team and keep it together.

Definitely, a good share of the gratitude that we feel is well deserved by your next of kin, for their support and understanding. We all need this tower of strength, safe haven, unselfish support from our families and friends – everything that will give us the strength that we need to be successful in our professions.

It is important that we have the ability to notice, on a daily basis, the efficiency of our compatriots and to find a moment to say a word of praise. This works wonders, not for just one individual alone but for all of us.

However, I don't think that dispensing the decorations in abundance would be right, as the dignified stories of people who have truly earned the decorations would then disappear among the masses. Instead, I wish for every recipient of the decoration of the Republic of Estonia to be highlighted as a good example within his or her sphere or in society in general.

You all deserve it. Your deeds make Estonia stronger. The stories of your excellence tell the story of Estonia growing greater.

I thank you. Estonia thanks you."

Estonian Television will broadcast the recording of the awarding of the decorations tomorrow, on 24/02/2014, at 15:40.

Decision of the President of the Republic on the awarding of the decorations of the Republic of Estonia:

<http://www.president.ee/et/ametitegevus/otsused/9802-368-riiklike-autasude-andmine/index.html>

Press release on the recipients of the decorations:

<http://president.ee/en/media/press-releases/9809-the-president-of-the-republic-to-award-decorations-to-99-people-on-the-eve-of-independence-day/index.html>

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