

Dear chevaliers of decorations,  
Ladies and gentlemen.

Dear friends, first of all I will just say: thank you.

The President is legally entitled once a year to express his recognition by conferring decorations on those who have – with their sense of duty, the goodness of their heart, their inventiveness – made us greater as human beings and as a state. To those who are not in the avant-garde of life or displayed on magazine covers, but whose accomplishments and attitude are worthy of distinction.

These decorations are a small recognition from the state to which you have given more than was due in the line of your profession or your calling. Unfortunately, good often merits less notice than bad, just as an encouraging pat on the shoulder is rarer than bitter scolding.

This is a list of givers, a journalist wrote when he had read the list of people to be decorated. It is not important whether you work as a teacher, a preserver of nature, a doctor, a chronicler of our history, a policeman, a creative artist, or a public servant, or serve Estonia on foreign missions in Afghanistan or in Iraq. You are committed.

Unfortunately, there is a dull stain on the ceremony of decorations even this year. If last year, a lively and certainly justified discussion was aroused by the great number of decorations and the fact that they were endowed on some members of the former nomenklatura, today there has been much talk about those who, for various reasons that in most cases were not in the least personal, were excluded from the list of decorations.

This is regrettable.

I apologize for the aspersions cast on some of our fellow citizens when the so-called “fourth estate”, proceeding from a dictate of the Estonian Data Protection Inspectorate, threw upon them a shadow of shameless speculations. Perhaps we need an Inspectorate of Human Dignity, who would interfere on such occasions and defend our fellow citizens against groundless suspicions. A decoration is always awarded as a token of recognition, but not receiving a decoration is never a punishment. It is just not possible to recognize all good people in the same year.

I felt seriously offended when a large newspaper commented on the list of people to be decorated this year as “a comparatively grey and humdrum lot”. I felt offended not on my own behalf, but on behalf of all these brilliant and interesting individuals whom the state is recognizing with decorations today.

Among you, there is Anette-Marlen Ott, a 13-years-old schoolgirl from Tartu County, who organized a collection for a home of stray animals. Her school, Konguta Elementary School, has an eloquent motto: “Notice, influence, make a difference”. These words contain the reason why all of you are here today.

You have noticed, you have influenced, you have made a difference.

For this, I thank you.