

"Today, we are grieving and commemorating the life of Kristjan Jalakas, a brave Estonian soldier whose life was tragically cut short, and our condolences belong to his family, friends, and brothers in arms." President of the Republic  
at the government obsequy of Junior Sergeant  
Kristjan Jalakas in St. John's Church, Tallinn,  
19th December 2009

Beloved next of kin and friends of Kristjan Jalakas.  
Respected members of the Defence Forces.

Today, we are grieving and commemorating the life of Kristjan Jalakas, a brave Estonian soldier whose life was tragically cut short, and our condolences belong to his family, friends, and brothers in arms.

We do not have to conceal or be ashamed of the confusion and pain that strikes us every time we receive a mournful message from the battlefield. And, once again, we bow our heads to an interrupted life and dreams, which will now remain only dreams.

However, as strong as the pain that Estonia feels on days like this is the pride we take in the courage of our soldiers.

Only this very spring, Kristjan Jalakas attended his old school and told the high school graduates about conscript services in the Defence Forces. No one should evade service in the defence forces, he emphasised, and then he told of his decision to choose the road of a professional soldier. Kristjan Jalakas said he was about to depart for a foreign mission, and as one of the teachers recommended that he give it some more consideration, the soldier replied that he had already done so.

I do believe that none of the soldiers who fight in Afghanistan have made their decision lightly. On the contrary, this is a well-considered and voluntary decision of each defence force member. To serve his/her country in the most dangerous place.

All the soldiers are also united by the knowledge that if Estonia helps its allies, our allies will help Estonia. If it would be necessary here. Junior Sergeant Kristjan Jalakas, who was received with the last post trumpet signal yesterday in Tallinn Airport, fell for Estonia.

Last year, on 24th February, Kristjan Jalakas, then a graduate student, played the role of a soldier fighting in the War of Independence in a play staged to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Republic of Estonia. His hero said the following words:

*"We dreamt of freedom as we desired to express our thoughts, our feelings.*

*/---/*

*Was I scared? Yes, I was scared, but I was even more scared of losing hope. The hope to become free."*

A war is something to be scared of, something that even soldiers need to be scared of. But a good soldier – and Kristjan Jalakas was a good soldier – will put his responsibility to the mission, his comrades, and his country above his fears. All this involves some idealism – which must be there – as otherwise we could not make the world a better place. The Estonian soldiers are also fighting in Afghanistan for a better, safer, and more peaceful world.

Our defence force members are located in the most restless and violent place in South Afghanistan, the Helmand province. They are the farthest outpost into enemy territory, where we soon hope to receive some more allied forces. This should improve the situation there. Until then, our soldiers must hold up.

On this sad day, our thoughts and words go out to all the Estonian Defence Force members who serve their country thousands of kilometres from home. ESTCOY-9 soldiers – stick together, defend each other's back, and remain sharp and cool. You are fighting for what is right.

I address Junior Sergeant Kristjan Jalakas for the last time. You were a brave Estonian soldier. I thank you for your service. I bow my head.