

Dear friends, loved ones and brothers in arms of Herdis Sikka.

War has claimed the life of a young man.

Even the most carefully considered words would be of no consolation here.

But I want you to know this: Junior Sergeant Herdis Sikka fought for the right thing. He fought against evil and violence, for a safe, secure and successful Afghanistan, and more broadly for a more peaceful world. Herdis Sikka fought for Estonia's security interests as a member of NATO, which is to say he fought in the interests of an alliance that is militarily strong, unified and successful in its operations.

Afghanistan – especially southern Afghanistan, where Estonian defence forces serve – is a dangerous location, extremely dangerous. If it were the opposite – a safe place – we would not be needed there. It would not be necessary for young men to make the courageous decision to quit their homes for the battlefield, nor would we need the support from the home front that makes it possible to deploy troops. Right now we need all of this badly.

Soldiers, I bow before your bravery.

I reaffirm to the members of the defence forces fighting in Afghanistan that you are not alone. Our allies from NATO and the UN are at your side, and Estonia's support is at your back. Your homeland supports you.

That is why I appeal to all fellow Estonians with this humble, human entreaty. Please do everything in your power to support the soldiers serving on this far-off and dangerous mission

and their families here in our midst. Just like the rear supplies the front with materiel, let there be a supply line of understanding and empathy for our soldiers.

And let us separate political decision-making from the soldiers that carry out those decisions. Anyone who has an opinion on the future of this operation, by all means let them express it – Estonia is a democracy and this is perfectly normal. But let us reserve our most unwavering support and solidarity for our soldiers and their families. Although they have chosen the soldier's profession voluntarily, Estonian soldiers have been deployed on a foreign mission by the Estonian state and in Estonia's interests.

My comments are not restricted to the personnel serving in Afghanistan. I am also thinking of those who have served on this mission in the past, the veterans of the Iraq mission and, in particular, the young men and women who have been injured on foreign missions.

None of them should feel alone or abandoned. We must adhere to a clear principle – just as we cannot abandon our soldiers on the battlefield, we should not deprive them of attention, care and understanding when they have been seriously injured and are home again. The state deployed these soldiers; accordingly it is the state's duty to allow them to readjust as well as possible and not succumb to the stress. As we know all too well – and I am truly sorry about this – an injured warrior can join the ranks of the fallen even once he is home again.

Today, as we stand in mourning by the flag-draped casket of young warrior Herdis Sikka, we see in our mind's eye, standing in silent file, all of the soldiers who have fallen on Estonia's foreign missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and we remember them: Andres Nuiamäe, Arre Illenzeer, Kalle Torn, Jako Karuks, Ivar Brok, Allain Tikko, Eerik Salmus, Raivis Kang, Kristjan Jalakas. And we also think of Aare Viirmaa, who came home again, only to leave us.

Along with Herdis, every one of these men fought for Estonia. For us. Estonia will not forget you. We will not forget you.

My deepest sympathy goes out to the friends and family of Herdis Sikka.

May you find solace in knowing that we will not forget your son and your brother, because

A time once occurred will no longer pass
though the permanence eludes the mind's grasp

(Artur Alliksaar)

Rest in peace, dear Herdis. On behalf of Estonia, I thank you for your service.