



**Address by the President of the Republic of Estonia Kersti
Kaljulaid at the 76th United Nations General Assembly
22.09.2021**

Mr President (of the General Assembly)

Mr Secretary General,

Your Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sisters and brothers,

I am so sorry we have not been able to meet each other for so long. I feel especially sorry that the conversations we started with many of you on digital development and digital in development have been discontinued. Yes, brainstormings, hackathons and similar events have continued online, delivering, in particular, fresh ideas at lightning speed on how to best overcome or circumvent the circumstances we were all suddenly thrown in.

I am proud how we have rushed online globally, to reach out to each other, to provide education support, to develop e-court services, to

deliver as much as we could, contactless. My special greetings go to the Chief Prosecutor of Kenya, who has made sure that Kenyan people can turn to the courts and receive verdicts while unable to travel, unable to meet. Kenya is not turning back, because even when travel would be safe again, why should someone take a trip of hundreds of kilometres to be heard?

This is an encouraging example. Through the tears we have shed for our lost ones, from the despair and devastation, solutions have sprung which will enable us to become better, more egalitarian societies. I hope all governments who have seen the benefits of online service provision will continue down this avenue. This helps people from rural areas, women with small children unable to go and queue at government offices, people with special needs, access better what societies can offer them.

There is another positive takeaway from the pandemic – if we truly globally concentrate our financial and scientific efforts on a problem, we can overcome. But only if we really feel the urgency. I feel encouraged for the fight against climate change – it is at least as dangerous to human race as a pandemic is. This urgency is widely accepted. We can overcome, some day – the day will come when we will be able to look back, as humankind, and find we have made the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere to descend.

It will not be the day when we see planet Earth calming down. The unexpected storms, heatwaves in otherwise moderate places and snow in regions which are not used to its cold bite, will continue even when we have stopped the trend of rising emissions. But it will be the day we give back hope to our children. Because from that point onwards they can hope that the planet will slowly get better again.

If we can take these – more supportive governments towards the weaker in the societies and potential to use the same fervency we all together had to find vaccines now to stop climate change – the future generations will recognise this decade of this century as the Great Recovery.

If we fail, it will be marked as the Beginning of an End.

I hope it is the first, but even if it is, there are many urgent problems we need to concentrate our minds on also, while we keep the big picture in our minds.

Last Saturday, people in more than 160 countries across the globe united to clean up the world. In last 3 years more than 50 million people across the world have joined the initiative.

World Clean-Up Day launched by Estonians in 2008 is by today one of the biggest civic movements of our time, uniting about 160 countries across the world for a cleaner planet. The simple act of cleaning has become a force that binds together people and groups that would otherwise never dream of working towards the same goal. This is a great

example of the grassroots power of people, united by technology and the will to do something by themselves to save our planet. Our people can organise all by themselves and do a lot by and for themselves, but not all.

Conflicts still ravage many countries and new ones have occurred. Wars continue to be fought from Ukraine to Syria. Authoritarian regimes like Belarus, for example, have come up with new hybrid tools to attack democratic societies with innocent people. Those who suffer the most continue to be the most vulnerable in our societies – women, children and adolescents.

When I visited **Afghanistan** this April, I had the opportunity to meet women, children and adolescents who had grown up in a society of reconstruction and hope towards the future. The women worked as midwives, had the chance to go to school and work, take care of their own families and to assist others with their knowledge and experience. Today their future looks grim to say the least. So does the situation in the whole country. The humanitarian needs there are enormous. About half of Afghanistan's population, more than 18 million, is in the urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including women and children.

As the UN Global Advocate for **Every Woman Every Child**, it makes me sad that the progress seen during the past two decades in Afghanistan could be reverted so quickly.

While despairing for Afghan women's rights to participate in the society in any normal way, we must not forget that the opportunities for women and children globally have been hit hard by the pandemic. Even the most developed countries are not exempt.

The statistics which concerns women's participation in the workforce or their proportion among the unemployed, the number of women unable to reach ante- or postnatal care, the number of children deprived of school meals – is the silent testimony, a dark shadow of this pandemic. And things were not good even before the COVID hit – for example, we were not on track to reach our SDG goal of Zero Hunger by 2030.

The data gathered by H6 institutions with whom I cooperate as the UN Global Advocate predicts we will have to rethink many of our development strategies in order to gain ground lost in pandemics and then some.

The shadow pandemic of starvation, lack of access to education or medical care – is going to continue at least until we manage to vaccinate the global population, and then it will take more time still to turn the negative trends around.

Estonia is contributing at least 900 000 doses of vaccination – almost each grown-up in Estonia who takes a shot donates one to someone else globally. Without vaccinating the global population, there is no way to even start the recovery from the shadow pandemic. **We all are responsible for the future**, and we all have to do our bit.

On September 17th Estonia (together with our Baltic friends Latvia and Lithuania) celebrated the 30 years anniversary of joining the UN. Thirty years is a little bit more than one human generation. Today Estonia is an elected member of the United Nations Security Council. Over the years, we have been not only security consumers, but also **responsible contributors** in different regions in the World from Sahel to Afghanistan and Iraq.

In March 2019, as the president of the 4th Session of the UN Environment Assembly Estonia led the adoption of a ministerial declaration whereby countries all over the world agreed to create a global environmental data strategy for 2025. The strategy foresees the development of common data standards and increasing the quality of environmental data. It also aims to foster cross-border data sharing and interoperability, improve countries' environmental monitoring capacities and improve data analysis methods.

To support this process, Estonia is launching a global alliance, Data for the Environment Alliance – or **DEAL** for short – that would bring together countries interested in improving the quality and accessibility of environmental data and developing digital solutions. Since environmental problems are crossing national borders, we should do away with all borders when using environmental data. The DEAL will launch during the 5th United Nations Environment Assembly in February 2022.

All countries can make a difference, regardless of their size.

In the 19th century, the importance of a nation was based on natural resources and territory. In the 20th century primarily on military force. Today, the main resource of countries are our **people**. People, not as merely as tools of production, but as individuals with their **rights and freedoms, as well as unbounded imagination, ingenuity and entrepreneurship**. Only truly free people are creative enough to thrive in 21st century. Only democracies can give such freedom to people. That is why democracy, human rights and the rights of the nations, are the most important tools for peace and prosperity.

Long-term peace and prosperity can only be born from the respect for basic rights. In Estonian minds, technological transformation cannot be separated from the respect from the basic rights and freedoms.

The digital transformation and the integrated data economy are one of the greatest opportunities for our future and makes countries more efficient. This is particularly important for small countries with limited resources.

There is also another important aspect of the digitalisation we can never forget - **digital as an equaliser**. In order to prevent the emergence of the digital inequality and division, last year Estonia and Singapore were co-sponsoring a Global Declaration on the Digital Response to COVID-19, “Close the Digital Divides: the Digital Response to COVID-19”.

Of course, the value we can extract from tools is contingent upon their utility—the manner in and the purpose for which those tools are used. We must not help repressive states become more efficient. Instead, we have to help those who are keen on using digital tools for the benefit of their citizens, not to their detriment and oppression. It is important for Estonia that the basis of our cooperation are shared values, principles, and interests—all of which fundamentally hinge on trust, particularly **trust created through digital means.**

At the recent Tallinn Digital Summit we discussed how to utilise trust, transparency, and the free flow of data to make large-scale, cross-border infrastructure investments trustworthy. Collective concern of governments and international organizations demonstrated the need for a shared framework to underpin our cooperation — Trusted Connectivity. This framework articulates the common vocabulary, interest, values, principles, and standards necessary for us to safeguard democracy and to ensure democratic countries respond to the global demand for physical and digital infrastructure by offering a higher-quality, higher-standard alternative to those connectivity providers who do not share our love of free societies.

Estonia has been since the early days among the creators of the normative framework for responsible state behaviour in **cyberspace**. At its heart is international law, including the UN Charter in its entirety, international humanitarian law, human rights law. As the host nation of

the independent Tallinn Manual, which is starting its third run, we emphasise this wholeheartedly.

As an elected member of the Security Council, we were pleased to host the very first official discussion on cybersecurity in the Council earlier this year, which allowed us to raise awareness on threats to international peace and security stemming from the malicious use of cyberspace and create momentum for the implementation of our existing framework. Discussions on cybersecurity and cybercrime must ensure that we make a concentrated effort to implement the rules of the road we already have. We cannot go down this road without bringing companies and civil society along.

Legal frameworks have utmost importance, but laws alone do not protect us: we also need **empathy, democracy, rule of law, good governance and the flexibility** to adopt changes caused *inter alia* by Covid-19. Countries are exporting what they actually are and what happens inside their own country. Countries that repress their people spread fear also to other countries and societies.

That is why we have to talk about the repressions in **Belarus**, stand in solidarity against the aggressive and destabilizing behaviour of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime and remain convinced that the will of the Belarusian Nation should be the main guideline for shaping the future of the Republic of Belarus.

That is why we can't forget **occupied Crimean** peninsula and the situation in **Eastern Ukraine**. Ukraine has our strong and unwavering

support for their sovereignty, territorial integrity and for non-recognition policy of the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia. Security is indivisible – Ukrainian security is also ours. As an elected member of in the UN Security Council, we continue to keep the issue of Russia's aggression in Donbass and illegal annexation of Crimea on the UNSC agenda.

That is why we have to talk about **migration flows** affected by instability and unrest in different continents.

That is why Estonia supports the idea of Summit for Democracy hosted by the President Biden.

That is why Estonia from her side is hosting the next Global Conference for Media Freedom in order to boost the synergies of internet and media freedom in the situation where journalists and media workers are more and more dependent on internet freedom and modern technologies. Advancing media freedom goes also hand in hand with combatting disinformation.

And that is why we continue to support the rights of women and girls around the world – there can be no democracy, no security and no development without one half of the humankind.

When looking at the future, we need to talk about the rights and protection of children, in particular in situations of conflict. In Afghanistan, at least 45 per cent of the population are children under 15

years of age – they need protection, access to education and healthcare, or we add to the never-ending cycle of conflict.

Estonia as an elected member of the Security Council has put special emphasis on the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace processes and on fighting sexual and gender based violence. We have tried to give a voice to women human rights defenders by inviting them to brief the Security Council. We were also able to draw attention to the ever-deteriorating situation of children in armed conflicts, which has been even more amplified by COVID-19. Nevertheless, we know, it is by no means enough. Tangible action is needed more than ever.

The United Nations relies on “cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character”. However, solidarity is achieved in practice only if we follow principles of the solidarity every single day. There is a great potential of solidarity in the UN regardless of the problems we are facing.

If there is a will, there is a way.

Thank you!