

United Nations Sustainable Development Summit 2015

26. September 2015

Statement by H.E. Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves

President of the Republic of Estonia

Mr. President,
Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is a crucial year of global action towards a sustainable world. The historic agreement on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been reached. For the first time, all countries in the world have agreed at the UN level to set the same sustainable development goals, regardless of their size or level of development. This universal and highly ambitious agenda follows and expands on the Millennium Development Goals.

The global challenges we face are complex, yet they are interlinked. The risks of armed conflicts and crises, forced migration, weak economies and corrupt governments, poor education, climate change and natural disasters — just to name a few, are all closely linked together. **The current refugee crises are** not only about emergencies, but also about a lack of long-term and lasting solutions.

The main strength of the SDGs is their **comprehensiveness**. We can tackle the challenges successfully together only by recognizing their complexity. **Peace and security is the first pillar and** basic prerequisite for the sustainable development. **And here we struggle with many urgent challenges in Syria, in Ukraine..**

Another pillar is addressing natural catastrophes. That's why **climate change** has a prominent place in our agenda this year. We have high expectations to reaching a new agreement on the **Climate Change Convention** at the Paris Climate Conference in December.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Agreeing on SDGs is not purely a theoretical process. The key is turning them into **strong public policies**. It is first and foremost in the hands of the governments to pave the way towards **sustained economic growth** and **human development**. Both are dependent on good **governance**, strong and accountable institutions, **rule of law** and adherence to universally agreed **human rights** for all, including women and girls. Freedom of expression and association, access to independent media, including social media and Internet, are integral parts of good governance and the rule of law. These, together with a transparent and efficient legal environment and fight against corruption, increase competitiveness, create new jobs and innovation. **It also raises the well-being of individuals and strengthens their connection with the state.**

Thus, sustainability has to start at home for it to work on a global scale. Governments, its agencies and ministries together with the private sector and civil society should come together and discuss the implications of the SDGs to their policies. Estonia also faces its own challenges and we look forward to working on them within the newly agreed framework.

I am a strong advocate of opportunities that **information and communication technology** can provide for development. What if it took you less than five minutes and no accountants to get your taxes done? What if 95% of citizens declare their income online and bring tax administration costs down to only 0.3% of net tax revenues? Would you like to set up a new company and have it legal and running within 20 minutes? What about signing business contracts or official documents digitally, without leaving your office or scheduling a notary appointment?

This is possible in Estonia where we started using ICT solutions actively when the Millennium Development Goals were discussed 15 years ago, and we had limited resources available. Today many see us as one of the most technologically-advanced countries in the world. Our public sector has been crucial in providing a favorable legislative environment, but also in funding the country's key technology infrastructure and providing online electronic services to individuals and businesses.

We have learned that the smart use of the Internet and digital technologies can be essential drivers for **economic growth** and **human development**. We also know that if we want the digital era to become a true success for each country and each member of the society, it requires strong public policies. **Something that only governments can provide**. Estonia is ready to cooperate with other states where our experience and knowledge is needed and would have an added value.

It is time for the world leaders to place the potential of digital technologies at the top of the development agenda. I am glad to co-chair the advisory panel of the World Bank's **World Development Report 2016**. The report titled **Digital Dividens** will be the World Bank's most influential report next year. It examines how the Internet can be a force for development and asks importantly what is required to unlock the potential of still largely unrealized digital technologies. **I invite you to continue with the discussion tomorrow at 11 am in the conference room 3 at the high-level panel discussion on the Development in the Digital Age.**

In conclusion, *pacta sunt servanda* — agreements must be kept and no one should be left behind.

Thank you!
