

**Address of Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma
at the Opening Event of the European Development Days
3 June 2015, at 11:30, Brussels, Tour&Taxis Exhibition Centre**

Distinguished Excellences, Ministers and Commissioners,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to participate in the most important development forum in Europe.

We are halfway through the European Year for Development. It was only quite recently that we [together with Mr Juncker] opened the European Year for Development in Rīga, the capital city of Latvia.

I am delighted that this year the whole of Europe has been mobilized for development cooperation, and Latvia is holding its Presidency in this truly historic moment for global development.

Therefore, today I would like to speak about the accomplishments of Latvia – the country holding the presidency of the Council of the European Union, and further activities this semester. I would particularly like to emphasize two very important issues on the agenda of development cooperation:

- 1) the new UN sustainable development goals beyond 2015;
- 2) and the need to eliminate gender discrimination.

First, the new Post-2015 sustainable development goals.

That is exactly during the Latvian Presidency when all global negotiations about the world's future for next 15 years are in the decisive stage.

Post-2015 negotiations are a truly unique global process. Never before in the world history have so many partners been involved in drafting a development document and so many views heard from around the world.

We have a lot of work to do - we want to fully eliminate poverty, ensure environmental sustainability, create inclusive global economy and achieve gender equality and education for all - these are just some of 17 sustainable development goals.

However, setting the ambitious targets is only the first step, but to change the history, the action and mutual cooperation are of vital importance.

Immediate action is needed to address the new global challenges and migration in particular. Cooperation is needed between all – migrants' country of origin, transit and recipient countries. It is unacceptable that people are forced to leave their homeland

and risk their lives in the hope of decent living conditions/observance of fundamental rights.

Although the European Union is actively working to save lives of people in the Mediterranean, this set of activities is just a struggle with the consequences of broader structural problems. Development cooperation is a policy that can directly address the economic, social, political and environmental causes of forced and illegal migration.

The development cooperation policy has the tools to raise the standard of living and stabilize the political situation to ensure the rule of law and rights, to create jobs and decent living conditions for every resident.

Therefore, we have to fundamentally change the way we cooperate. By 'we' I mean all stakeholders - countries, civil society, local governments, employees and employers in all continents, in all cities and villages.

Everyone has to take responsibility, and our cooperation has to be transparent and inclusive. Only by working together – in a strong global partnership - we will achieve the common goals before 2030.

The new global partnership should promote human rights, equality, good governance, rule of law; inclusion, environmental sustainability and take into account the limits of our planet. These principles should be implemented at all political levels - international, regional and national, in particular.

Based on Latvia's experience, I would like to stress that target setting at the level of national government is crucial.

In 2000 when the Millennium Development Goals were adopted, Latvia had not yet joined the European Union and NATO. Currently, we are holding the presidency of the Council of the European Union, and we are proud that within a short time we have managed to turn from beneficiaries into donors.

We recently learnt valuable lessons from overcoming the deep economic crisis. When in 2008, GDP in Latvia fell by 25%, the national coordination, an inclusive social policy and structural governance reforms helped us to overcome it. In addition to the reforms carried out to become a Member State of the EU and NATO, this is the experience that we are ready to pass on.

The international system is an indispensable support, but each country itself is fully responsible for the welfare of its population and sustainable economic growth.

Sharing experiences and the lessons learned on equal partnership basis is a central element of the development cooperation implemented by Latvia.

Turning to the second item of my speech, I would like to emphasize that our main objective is to observe the human rights of the entire world population without reservation.

Women's and girls' rights are human rights. But they are still violated in many places of the world. The data show that 35% of women worldwide have suffered a physical or sexual assault. If nothing changes in current efforts, at least 80 years would be needed to achieve gender equality globally. We cannot wait so long.

That is why Latvia as one of the global leaders in the field of gender equality has set the women's and girls' rights and gender equality as an important priority of the presidency. Every girl in the world should have the opportunity to become the Prime Minister, if she so wishes.

Latvia has the experience to share with other countries. Supporting gender equality in various sectors, we have managed to achieve that

- 53% of scientists in Latvia are women;
- 68% of people with higher education are women;
- and women take managerial positions in more than 40% of Latvian enterprises that is the highest indicator among the Member States of the European Union.

Gender equality has been our priority at the highest political level in Brussels and New York while organizing thematic conferences, actively participating in the drafting of strategic policy documents, as well as in negotiations with the private sector and the civil society.

I invite everyone to attend tomorrow's debate on concrete solutions to strengthen economic opportunities for women in Central Asia organized by the Latvian Presidency. Women and girls are an untapped potential for increasing public well-being.

There are currently discriminatory laws against women in 140 countries. Therefore, it is necessary to provide them with legitimate and real opportunities to use their potential, because we all are beneficiaries. For example, according to the UN prospects, the provision of women and men with the same number of jobs would result in GDP growth by 15% in developing countries.

To conclude my speech, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to be here. The European Development Days is an outstanding example of global cooperation to share experiences and find solutions for sustainable development.

I wish you creative discussions and may the European Development Days be filled with cooperation!

Thank you.