

Speech of **Mr Toomas Kivimägi**, First Vice-President of the Riigikogu at the General Debate

“Nurturing hope, securing peace and ensuring justice for future generations”.

152nd IPU Assembly, Istanbul, Türkiye

Distinguished Chair, dear colleagues, honourable hosts!

In a war, everyone loses.

Hundreds of millions of people are in war; tens of millions have been forced to leave their homes or even their homeland. These are not stories from a history book. Unfortunately, they reflect our own times. Directly or indirectly, these wars touch everyone on planet Earth. This is confirmed by the drastic rise in the price of oil and other raw materials – the lifeblood of the economy – across the world. We are all paying for the war. There is a real risk of stagflation, where economic growth slows down while inflation, which is also known as the “war tax”, accelerates. This will not make any of us richer, except that it makes it somewhat easier to pay off loans, especially for great powers. But that comes at the expense of all of us. Loan growth itself is increasing at a tremendous speed, and one of the main reasons for that is the rise in defence spending for both large and smaller countries around the world. The increase of defence spending is money taken from our better daily lives and our future. This means unbuilt roads, schoolhouses and sports fields, as well as weakened social and health insurance. Is this the legacy we want to leave to future generations?

My home country, Estonia, has also been forced to follow this path. Because of our aggressive eastern neighbour Russia, we have had to increase our defence spending to 5% of GDP, which is an enormous challenge for all other sectors and has meant a sharp rise in national debt burden for us as well. The reason for this should come as no surprise: independence and sovereignty are the highest values a free nation desires, and even more so, they determine that a nation is free.

We live in an era of great power rivalry. The rules-based world order is fading. And it has been replaced by force. By military and economic superiority. This painful truth was stated loudly, clearly and convincingly by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney. This is an extremely dangerous trend that we all must stop together. Because none of us knows who will be the next victim of force. It could be you yourself; it could be your country. Paradoxically,

the great powers themselves are not the winners either: for them, too, the cost of war is very high, as can be seen from the United States' plans to increase defence spending by over 50%, or the aggressor state Russia, whose entire economy is serving the military and the war industry, and tens or even hundreds of thousands of soldiers have perished. If human life no longer has value, if a person has become like a tin soldier that, in a figurative sense, can be melted down at any moment, then something is very wrong in Russia. Even more unjust are the losses suffered by Ukraine, a country that was attacked and must defend itself against the aggressor.

The best weapons against war are cooperation, words and negotiations. The most important prerequisite for this is the capacity for empathy, and respect for the rights, traditions and unique nature of other peoples. My favourite saying is that in a world with over 8 billion people, no two people are exactly alike, neither in appearance nor in their thoughts. We are all different. And that is the greatest value in the world. Because just think what the world would be like if we all were alike.

We must return to a rules-based world order, cooperation and negotiations. However, an essential prerequisite for achieving this is that war crimes will be punished. For example: Russia's accountability and punishment for war crimes in Ukraine is a preventive prerequisite of the utmost importance in averting future acts of aggression.

At this point, it is fitting to conclude in the spirit of Hemingway with the words of John Donne: "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee. When the world loses a single person, it makes you poorer as well".

The world is a wonderful place to live. But on one condition: there must be no war!
May there be peace in the world and in all your hearts.

Thank you for your attention!