



LATVIJAS VALSTS PREZIDENTS

## **The Speech of the President of Latvia on the Remembrance Day for the Victims of Communist Genocide at the Freedom Monument on 25 March 2017**

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we commemorate one of the darkest pages in the history of Latvia. On 25 March 1949, the Communist occupation regime deported more than 42 thousand inhabitants of Latvia. It is incomprehensible nowadays how more people than currently living in the whole Ogre Region could have been physically captured and deported in one day on the territory of Latvia. Today we honour the victims of the deportations, and we remind others and ourselves, why we must never forget this tragedy.

When this blood-chilling crime was planned and committed here, the war had just ended in Europe. The people elsewhere were able to hope for a new and peaceful life, but a new occupation occurred in Latvia that did not allow taking rest. Despite the overwhelming superiority of Soviet power, the fight for freedom continued in the woods, which echoed in the hearts and minds of the population.

The deportation on March 25 was aimed at breaking our spirit of resistance, depriving support for the national guerrilla groups, destroying decent doers, the patriots of free Latvia. There were the most active and visible people deported to Siberia. The power demanded unconditional obedience from those, who remained. Then, after the state of Latvia had been already eliminated, the people were deprived of their accomplishments, the hope for the future, their land, and their opportunity to work for their own benefit. The people driven to the collective farms lost their satisfaction in the fruits of their work, because executing the orders and trying not to think about the misery around were the key issues.

Nobody was protected against the threat of retaliation. The inhumanity of the regime is especially evidenced by the fact that there were many children and elders among the deported people. The occupants brutally fought against unarmed people. They were ready to do everything, because destroying those, whose presence reminded of free Latvia, was crucial. They eradicated individualism, enterprise, and responsibility, as those qualities were dangerous for any occupying power.

However, the dream of a free Latvia survived. It was secretly kept, cherished, and got the chance to flourish in its full glory once again.

I would like to address specifically the people, who had suffered deportations themselves. Your memories of the homeland, hopes for returning home to Latvia were the main reason to withstand the deportation. You will always be standard-bearers of our freedom and independence, both those, who returned and took part in the restoration of Latvia, and those many thousands, who remained

in exile forever. Your destiny, unbreakable spirit, and love of the homeland remind us of the courage and hope that we may never lose. This is a proof of our nation's strength and ability to survive and to regenerate.

There are 68 years passed since the deportations on March 25. During the period, there are new people born and grown up in Latvia, who have been brave enough to fight for Latvia's independence once again and who are strong enough to protect it. Commemorating the deported people, we must always remember about the virtue of hard work, taking care of our land and our country, entrepreneurial spirit to be creative and to face difficulties, and the responsibility for our own deeds.

The occupants were so much afraid of those qualities, because they form the foundation of a free society and an independent state. We must foster and take advantage of those qualities, as it is our ancestral wisdom to build the flourishing Latvia. We forge our own future and that is the best way to take care of the security and development of Latvia in the ever-changing world. We have made the dream of the deported compatriots of free Latvia come true. Now we can protect and improve our beloved country.

May God give us strength and confidence in what we do!