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Statement by

H.E. Ms Baiba BRAŽE

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia

Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

In the 30 years since the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**, we have taken remarkable strides towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. Yet, today we must also confront the stark realities that women and girls face globally – in Afghanistan, Iran, Sudan, the DRC –, as progress remains fragile and uneven. Women and girls continue to face gender-based discrimination and sexual violence, they are denied access to education and healthcare, and continue to be deprived of fundamental freedoms. We must spare no effort in urgently addressing these challenges.

Latvia is an international leader in gender equality and women's representation at the highest positions. Yet our commitment to women's empowerment is global. Latvia has increased its contributions to the UN Women and other UN bodies to address immediate needs but also long-term measures to fight inequality and oppression. Together with NGOs, we have implemented projects to rehabilitate survivors of violence in Ukraine and to

empower women and girls in Egypt, Ethiopia, Fiji, Namibia, Rwanda, Uzbekistan in the areas of entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and STEM. This is our long-term commitment.

Mr. President,

Three years ago, in an act of unprovoked and unjustified aggression, Russia launched a brutal, full-scale invasion of its sovereign peaceful neighbour – **Ukraine**. Thousands of innocent civilians have been killed, millions displaced, and entire cities reduced to rubble. There are hundreds of documented, and many more unreported, cases of Russia's systemic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. The acts of rape, torture, and humiliation committed by Russian soldiers are cruel and pure evil.

Russia's authorities have committed crimes against humanity by using torture as a coordinated state policy towards Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian children have been forcibly kidnapped, illegally deported and subjected to the so-called re-education efforts, in fact aimed at erasing their identity.

Behind each of those stories, lies a broken family, unspeakable pain and deep scars that persist for generations. Through this campaign, Russia is seeking to deprive Ukraine of its future. Russia must be held internationally accountable for its crimes.

The situation in **Gaza** and the West Bank with the immense loss of civilian lives, especially those of children and women, is unacceptable. We remain deeply concerned about the health of hostages still in captivity. Further measures to strengthen the protection of civilians and ensure the safe delivery of humanitarian aid at scale is of utmost priority. A negotiated end to all hostilities must be adhered to by all sides. Returning to talks on a sustainable, long-term solution is critical to breaking the cycle of violence.

Mr. President,

Human rights violations are not confined to conflict zones alone. In **Russia**, the human rights situation continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate. Opposition, human rights defenders, independent media face censorship, imprisonment and even death. Domestic repression continues to enable external aggression.

In **Belarus**, the recent sham elections were a total farce. The regime continues its relentless crackdown on civil liberties and direct support for Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Over one thousand political prisoners face cruel and inhumane treatment, long sentences, and mock trials. We will continue to support the Belarusian people and the democratic opposition in their quest for a free, sovereign, and independent Belarus.

Mr. President,

We all have a stake in the resilience of the multilateral system. Latvia stands ready to shoulder greater responsibility in safeguarding the UN Charter and demonstrating global solidarity, as a candidate for the **UN Security Council** for the term 2026-27. We will stand up for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity; sustainable peace and stability in the Middle East; engage on the "Women, peace and security" agenda and address emerging threats in the digital and information sphere.

If elected, we will work **together for peace and resilience**, advocate for the rule of law, human rights, fundamental freedoms and accountability.

I thank you.