



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR

**Speech by the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Nataša Pirc Musar,
at the opening ceremony of the 1st Slovenian Humanitarian Forum**

Ljubljana, 2 October 2023

Check against delivery.

*Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

It is a great honour for me to open the first Slovenian Humanitarian Forum, although in an ideal world we would not need such forums at all. I would like to talk about five issues that I believe are crucial today when we deal with humanitarian crises and actions.

I would like to start with emotions. I have said several times that I am not just a political office holder, I am also Nataša, who does not hide her feelings. And how can I hide my sadness when I have to share with you the following?

Many humanitarian crises, whether reported in the media or not, are driving humanitarian needs to record levels. There are currently 55 conflicts of various kinds around the world and at least USD 55 billion is needed for 363 million people in urgent need for help. The international donor community – governments, international organisations, private foundations and non-governmental organisations – has never before been under such pressure to help so many people with so few resources. We are only providing half of what is needed on an annual basis. More than 180 million people are left without the help they desperately need. That is as many people as the population of 90 Slovenias!

The crises around the world, serious violations of international law and human rights, the shrinking supplies of drinking water and food, the migrations... To oppress our fellow human beings, to live where life is worth nothing, is not the dignity that I myself stand for and that everyone in a civilised world should stand for.

In this context, I would like to say a few words about our perception of crises.

The world is changing and we need to be aware of this fact. In the past, humanitarian crises were geographically distant, which is why we did not pay attention to them. During the wars in the territory of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, we felt directly the suffering of people fleeing violence of all kinds. This memory is still very much alive, but we already find ourselves having to face Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Of course, Slovenia has not forgotten Ukraine.

In addition to substantial military assistance, we have provided material and humanitarian aid totalling more than EUR 10 million to date. At the same time, we have also not forgotten other countries. We have increased our aid to countries further affected by the food crisis exacerbated by the war in Ukraine six-fold, i.e. from EUR 260,000 in 2021 to over EUR 1.5 million in 2022.

But as I said, Ukraine is just one of the many terrible stories of human suffering around the world. So how should we move forward? What motivates us, what should motivate us to help people in need? The answer is short and clear: a sense of solidarity. This is the third issue I would like to highlight. The natural disaster in Slovenia in August caused unprecedented devastation in our country. But it also awakened solidarity among the people of Slovenia, and even among neighbours involved in unresolved disputes. Stories of solidarity with Slovenia are spreading across borders. Even those who need solidarity at home have come forward to help. Despite the war, Ukraine has sent machinery to Slovenia that it needs itself. More than 15 countries and international organisations have offered much appreciated and very welcome help.

The bitter experience in August has also taught us something else. Solidarity has prevailed among the Slovenian people, but our country cannot recover from the consequences of the storms and floods on its own. It had to ask for help from the European Union, whose central value is exactly that – solidarity. That is why I would also like to say a few words about international solidarity.

International solidarity is essential in addressing global humanitarian challenges. Through international solidarity, countries and international organisations share the burden of humanitarian tasks and provide assistance to those most in need, regardless of their nationality. The importance of burden-sharing can also be seen in the recent catastrophic floods in Libya and the earthquake in Morocco, where Slovenia also responded with emergency humanitarian aid totalling EUR 1 million.

Through international solidarity, countries can also join forces to tackle global challenges that are not of an exclusively humanitarian nature and thus help lead to a world where less humanitarian aid is needed. We need solidarity to tackle the climate crisis, poverty, hunger and migration. Solidarity is therefore a fundamental value both at home and in the international community – it is a path to peace, stability and justice.

Therefore I would like the first Humanitarian Forum in Slovenia to convey the message of the following:

- the importance of strengthening our commitment to solidarity and assistance to the victims of humanitarian tragedies around the world;
- the efforts aimed at working ever more effectively and delivering aid more quickly to those in need,
- the importance of creating new partnerships that will finally reverse the upward trend in needs,
- and the importance of implementing commitments to solidarity.

Thank you.