

**Address by the spouse of the President of the Republic of Slovenia Ales Musar at the
»80 Years of the UN: The Role of First Ladies and Gentlemen Unite for Peace and Prosperity«**

New York, 23. September 2025

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues!

The Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen became a global platform, a permanent network, by growing from the summits in Kyiv convened by Olena Zelenska who will speak as the founder and mention the important issues discussed at the Kyiv Summits. There are already five of them. Let me focus on how the Global Platform helps us, first ladies and gentlemen, to work better, more efficient and above all – together.

The crucial step was going from an annual event to permanent presence. It was achieved through virtual platforms, social media and enhanced communication. Let me use this opportunity to thank those who do immense work behind the scenes. The team of Olena: Victoria, Oleksandra, Anton, Nina and many others, as well as our own assistants and protocol officers. I will mention just Mateja who works with me, but I am sure each of us has someone to thank for the support. Thank you all!

The research on soft power of first ladies and gentlemen conducted by Brand Finance gave us a solid and scientific ground on which to build our work. It shows which are the areas and topics where our activities can have the largest impact. It also demonstrated influence of our activities on the soft power index of our respective countries. Soberingly, it can go both ways. With misguided conduct we can do harm. However, it also pointed a way to multiply the impact: by working together. It should be noted that our role is a supporting role to our spouses and their policies. That we are in service to our countries. But also, that we together can be in service to the humanity.

Internal discussions showed that the frameworks within which we operate are to large extent undefined. It is kind of a grey zone. There is no manual how to be and what to do as a first lady or gentleman. Communication between ourselves helps a lot. Identifying areas where additional knowledge would be helpful lead to the first workshop in Vienna on various topics, including geopolitics and protocol. Thank you, Olena and Doris Schmidauer of Austria for hosting this event. I expect many more where we can learn for example about cultural diplomacy in which some of the first ladies like Tamara Vučić of Serbia are so skilful.

Our power is giving visibility to causes where we are active. An important lesson here is that working together amplifies the impact. Let me give an example: Sanja Musić Milanović of Croatia initiated an international network for fighting childhood obesity, another non-communicable disease as Rossana Briceño of Belize previously mentioned the cancer, and I joined enthusiastically with a support of Slovenian National Institute of Public Health. My presence in the events attracts some attention, but when Sanja joins I found out that 1 + 1 is much more than. The “unique weight”, as Lucrecia Peinado of Guatemala put it, is far greater. I expect similar effect in other areas, and I am looking forward to the event of Diana Nausidiene of Lithuania in November. I hope for such effect also in working together with Nahmat Aoun of Lebanon in humanitarian projects there. And I think that the strength of working together is also recognised by the First Lady of the United States who just yesterday announced a global initiative for the first ladies and gentlemen to work together on very important issues of artificial intelligence, children and education.

It needs to be said though that in our activities we are faced with gender stereotypes. We spoke about this very clearly in this year Soft Power Summit in London. First ladies are sometimes expected to stick to the traditional “female” topics. And first gentlemen face a mirror image of these stereotypes. Sometimes we are chided that we are in a female role. But what those people are really saying is that our spouses as the presidents are in positions which should be occupied by men. And now I will say something which I have said before and I will keep saying until the situation changes: There are not enough men here. And by this I do not mean that there should be more men like me speaking in such panels, but that there should be more women like my wife speaking in the General Assembly.