

**Speech by H. E. Mr. Gitanas Nausėda, President of the Republic of Lithuania
at the sitting of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania
dedicated to the 30th anniversary of 13 January 1991
and the Freedom Prize 2021 award ceremony**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We talk about freedom as the greatest value of an independent state and its people as we annually honour the victims of 13 January 1991.

Today, against the backdrop of the lockdown, when we are trying to overcome the invisible enemy, the lessons of the past are even more valuable to us.

Three decades ago, we, the people of Lithuania, stood shoulder to shoulder to defend our country and succeeded in this. We defied fear. We neither gave up, nor surrendered. Nor did we disperse in the face of bloody terror, because we all kept standing together.

Today, faced with a serious challenge to the health and life of all the people of Lithuania, we have to make sacrifices again.

The pandemic might have been a painful, but a very timely reminder that freedom is not a mere satisfaction of one's everyday petty material desires. Freedom is the noblest and greatest when it helps an individual to grow and take the path of responsibility and conscious commitment. Freedom is especially admirable when it awakens the greatest virtues in people in times of hardship. Today, such examples are most manifest in the work of medical staff, teachers, and volunteers.

Thirty years ago, the people of Lithuania triumphed because they were truly free at the crucial moment, rather than merely sought freedom. On those bloody days of January 13, they assumed the responsibility and proved to be worthy citizens of an independent democratic state.

January the 13th will therefore always remind us that civil power is not, and has never been, a fiction. It is absolutely real and capable of changing the world and empowering the future. It lends a hand to those who suffer and helps those who falter. When the right time comes, civil power can lead to the fulfilment of our bravest dreams. We have seen that for ourselves.

Being conscious of the cost and value of freedom, we want values of democracy and respect for human dignity to spread far beyond Lithuania's borders. I am pleased that we are seeing increasingly more manifestations of civil power in our neighbourhood. There is increasingly more freedom that is courageous and responsible. The Freedom Prize, which today will be taken by Sviatlana Cichanouskaja on behalf of the democratic opposition in Belarus, attests to this.

We are well aware that our neighbours are facing challenging times. However, we must send them a clear message to stay strong, keep hope, and believe that free elections will

become a reality one day and that those who raise a gun against a determined nation will have to be held accountable for their actions.

Lithuania pursues justice although even 30 years have passed since the events of January 13. We will not tolerate any manifestations of political pressure on our judges, including any intimidations by another country. This is the duty of a democratic state that protects the freedoms of its people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having hoisted the torch of freedom, we should further pursue the direction of its flames. Let us remember those who did not give up in defence of our free future, and who fought and made the supreme sacrifice.

Let us pool and unite our efforts. Let us not be afraid of the difficulties. May our work serve as a tribute to the victims of January 13.
