

**Speech by H. E. Ms. Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen,
Speaker of the Seimas 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**

In the process of preparations for the solemn commemoration of the 30th anniversary of 13 January 1991, we thought it would be exceptional, but not in this way.

Celebrations and memorable dates, especially such as the Day of the Defenders of Freedom, pave the way for building social unity and national resilience. They provide a unique opportunity to revisit the past feelings, efforts, and decisions, as well as commemorate the people through whose endeavours we are free now and have our own state.

However, it is not just about revisiting History; it is also about connection and communication between those who, on the one hand, have things to remember as direct witnesses and can share and pass their experience on, and those who, on the other hand, want to hear and internalize this experience and become bearers of history.

This is how social memory is formed, cultural traditions are passed on, and history continues to be remembered. This shapes the values that inform the state-building efforts and foster the need to nurture and protect the state.

An important part of that communication and that direct transmission went missing this year. We are living under strict constraints on social life that we have to obey.

Paradoxically, however, the current circumstances seem to bring us back the spirit of that time, in a sense.

I was seven when the last imperial effort was made to halt the liberation process in January 1991. About half of today's members of the Government were my age or even younger at the time. A day will definitely dawn when our country will be led by the people born after the restoration of statehood of Lithuania.

Ours is the generation that has experienced life in freedom, but, due to understandable and objective reasons, lacks the experience of fighting for freedom. This generation may be taking freedom for granted as an obvious attribute of social life.

But, on closer inspection, freedom should never be taken for granted. It requires constant efforts, both internal and external ones. The benefits of freedom can be enjoyed without any second thoughts, yet one must never lose sight of the guarantees of the freedom and what they derive from.

The experience of 13 January 1991 is a clear reference to the sources of these guarantees. They are rooted in that part of society and those of its members who are willing to sacrifice their well-being and even their **fragile lives** without hesitation so

that we can all enjoy the benefits of freedom, sometimes without even thinking about it.

Time has turned back, we are faced with a threat again.

Time and again, medical staff are in the front rank, making a titanic effort. Volunteers are sacrificing their energy and time, again. Over and over again, we have to make decisions on which not only health but also life depends.

This time, however, the constraints are not imposed by strangers. We have taken them on independently in order to stop the spread of the pandemic and to save as many lives as possible. This is the fundamental difference, showing that we are free to both create and follow the rules.

And this is what living in a free state is all about.

Restrictions are, indeed, changing our lives, both on ordinary days and festive occasions. They impose distances to be kept and restrict communication.

However, at the same time, any restrictions make us pause to think. They create opportunities to delve deeper, have a better look at things, and listen more carefully.

We consider the meaning of 13 January 1991 for us today.

We acknowledge the values 13 January has brought to light and helped us to nurture.

And we recognise the impact of the impetus of 13 January on our efforts and decisions today.

The insights gained allow us to refine our values and become more resilient.

By delving into this effort on our own, individually, we feel the sense of togetherness as well.

I wish you a fulfilling Day of the Defenders of Freedom.

May we jointly remember and honour our compatriots whom we lost three decades ago on the night of 13 January 1991.