

## To the Universal Peace Federation World Summit

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I am delighted but also humbled to be here in front of you today, a gathering of such distinguished group of people from the entire world, contributors to global peace and development. This is an exceptional opportunity to tell you the story of my country and my people. This is truly a story of peace prevailing over conflict, of faith in goodness prevailing over fear, a story that started long time ago with bloody wars in the Balkans and it ended in peace finally prevailing in the country and the region I come from. My name is Hashim Thaci. I am the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, a small country in South East Europe that has a special place in the modern history of the world. My country is the last one to be established in the European continent and we celebrated the fifth birthday of the country on February 17. When I say that Kosovo has earned a special place in world history, I refer to what some of you may remember as the path that my people has taken in order to achieve peace, freedom and democracy.

Kosovo was a unit in the former Yugoslavia, a country that fell apart completely under the rule of nationalist regime in a series of bloody wars.

The neighboring Serbia, under the dictator Milosevic who died in prison in Hague awaiting an international trial for crimes committed towards my people as well as people of Bosnia and Croatia, had occupied my country and started a systematic campaign of violence. Over 10,000 people were killed in a short period of time. Over 1 million which means over half of the entire population suffered ethnic cleansing and was thrown out of the country by this vile regime. Over 20,000 women were raped.

I was a student when the oppression started, and I escaped to Switzerland as a student political dissident, preoccupied with the idea of resisting and overthrowing this regime of war and hate. I soon became a guerilla fighter and leader of men and women who took arms to resist. Our fight and our dedication to universal human values and our call for help was not left unanswered. The free world led by United States of America and major European countries helped us by bombing Serbia and defeating the forces that were causing so much havoc and misery.

Thus started the second stage of my political engagement. The war was won, people returned, and the United Nations set up a special protectorate to govern Kosovo until such day when we could govern ourselves and we could decide on the path our society will take.

Our society chose well. I am proud to have been at the forefront of people who chose human rights, dedication to peace, tolerance, and economic development -- people who cherished entrepreneurship and an open society as a way to move forward and develop our war-torn society.

The proudest moment of my life came in 2008. After years of engaging in earnest in negotiations with Serbia over the status of Kosovo, Nobel Prize Winner Marti Ahtisaari proposed plan to make Kosovo independent. We were promised self-determination in return for guaranteeing extensive rights to our minorities and a truly democratic system for our citizens. I gathered the representatives of the people from all communities and declared independence for my country on February 17, 2008.

I was proud that my son, our children will never again live in fear, will never again be taught of hate, will never again be questioned for the language they speak or the faith that they have.

What did we do in our five years of independence? Did we squander the opportunity that came with peace? What was my plan and the plan of my government for the life after freedom was obtained?

I will touch upon these questions in a few short remarks, hoping that some valuable lessons may be offered.

As I speak in a companionship of distinguished speakers who fought wars and rebuilt countries, my advice from the small republic of Kosovo may resonate as we share our experiences on how to make global peace a permanent feature of our times.



I will quote my dear colleague and speaker Xanana Gusmao from East Timor, who said that “after decades of strife, patience is most needed.”

We first made sure that our country was recognized. Serbia changed politicians and became democratic, but unfortunately their discourse towards Kosovars did not change much at the beginning and they were reluctant to acknowledge the crimes committed to Kosovars and accept the reality of the new state.

We received enormous help and in less than five years, despite resistance by some members of the Security Council, Kosovo is now recognized by almost 100 countries.

South Korea was among the first countries to do so, and we are eternally grateful for this sign of friendship. My people will never forget the positive role South Korea has helped in ensuring our status.

The most recent recognition came last week, when I hosted the representative of President Morsi of Egypt, and we are proud that one of the oldest civilizations in the world has also decided to recognize Kosovo.

We have become sovereign members of agencies such as IMF, World Bank, and other multilateral bodies, and we know the process of the recognition of our country will end with a UN seat for Kosovo in New York.

I use this opportunity to call upon you, distinguished leaders from countries that have not yet done so, to recognize the will of the people of Kosovo and join more than half of UN the membership including most of the EU and NATO states, most of the Organization of Islamic Conference states, and most of the Council of Europe states in accepting our hand of friendship and recognize us.

Economically, we started a program of stimulus that has enabled growth. I doubled the salaries of all public employees in five years, while I tripled the salaries of the prosecutors and judges.

We have initiated a construction program, and we have build modern motorway to the Adriatic Coast with top American companies and are building biggest airport in the Balkans with Turkish and French investors.

We have built 100 schools. From 2000 dollars GDP per capita in the last year before independence, we now reached 4000 dollars per capita, doubling the wealth of our citizens in five years.

Our growth is the second biggest in Europe, averaging five percent for the last five years, despite working in the global financial crisis that hit my country as much as yours. More needs to be done, especially in attracting foreign investments and tackling corruption and organized crime.

Most importantly, I insisted on reconciliation and normalization of relations with Serbia, and here is where we hope our contribution to world peace will be most appreciated. I'm coming to this fine conference from Brussels, the capital of united Europe, where I spent two days meeting with Serbia's Prime Minister Dacic.

He was my former adversary, but today, under the leadership of the EU and support of the USA, we have met five times to ensure that Serbia is recognizing the reality on the ground. In our previous meetings, Serbia recognized our republican diplomas, ID cards, courts, and borders. We now want to settle the status of the Serbs living in north of my country by integrating them fully in Kosovo's constitutional system.

The Prime Minister of Serbia has committed to work with me to achieve lasting peace and mutually beneficial normalization of relations.

The EU has told both of us that we must engage in a neighborly manner if we want to become members of the EU. This is what we want: a European Serbia recognizing Kosovo in the name of universal values but also local interests.

I will travel to New York soon to report to the Security Council my impressions from the dialogue. It's a difficult process, especially because we are still lacking a formal apology for the past horrible crimes committed against our own families. Nevertheless, for the sake of the future of our children, I will meet whomever and wherever to ensure that our peoples can focus on development and growth -- growth of families, growth of economy, and growth of values.

My government has enabled full minority protection.

Let me also add, as you may be interested to know, that we have also opened a true interfaith dialogue with religious communities, and my Foreign Ministry will organize a conference this May to gather top leaders of religions and interfaith issues to ensure that people of faith help us to trickle down the success of the dialogue I am having with the Serbian Prime Minister, down to the wider society, especially the youth. Kosovo is here to stay. It will not disappear. Compromises were needed, and we stayed committed to the cause of global peace.

HE Thaci, the Prime Minister of Kosovo. An address during the Universal Peace Federation World Summit in Seoul, South Korea.