



Welcome Remarks by the Secretary General

38th Meeting of the Governing Council of the Community of Democracies

Warsaw, 11 June 2024

Welcome to the Community of Democracies' 38th Governing Council Meeting. I join the Chair in greeting you, and I want to thank the United States for hosting this Meeting. As someone who has worked in the democracy field for more than three decades, I am grateful to the United States for its commitment to and support for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the Executive Committee - Canada, Morocco, Poland, the Republic of Korea, Romania, and the United States. Your leadership during this transition to a future Presidency has been exemplary. The significant decisions and tasks the Executive Committee has undertaken has served the Community of Democracies with great distinction, and for that, I am truly grateful.

Today's Agenda, a product of collective input from many Member States, holds great promise for our discussions. I eagerly anticipate the exchange of ideas and perspectives on such topics as information integrity, the creation of a Special Rapporteur on Democracy, and youth civic and political rights.

I also welcome your thoughts today on next year's 25th Anniversary of the Warsaw Declaration. The year 2000, when 107 nations gathered in Poland to look at issues of democracy and human rights, is in many ways a very different time than that in which we find ourselves today, but as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright noted in 2000: "Now, at the start of a new century, we have come together here in Poland, to pledge our cooperation in promoting and strengthening democracy. In doing so, we understand that the struggle for freedom is never easy and never over." Current events in the world today make this charge more important than ever.

The 25th Anniversary will be an extraordinary occasion for you, the Governing Council Members, not only to commemorate past achievements but also to define a path to advance freedom for the next 25 years. Your role in shaping the future of the Community of Democracies is pivotal and your active participation is crucial.

In closing, this will be the last Governing Council Meeting I attend as Secretary General, and although a farewell message will be forthcoming this summer, I ask permission to say a few words now.

Seven years have passed in a whirlwind of challenges and opportunities. From navigating the complexities of a global pandemic to securing annual funding for our operations, we have persevered and accomplished much. The experiences I value most are the ones shared with you- visiting your capitals, welcoming new Members onto the Governing Council, and advocating for freedom-seeking people in Myanmar, Belarus, Cuba, and Mali, among other places.

The mission-driven, hardworking staff of the Permanent Secretariat made the wonderful experiences and resolution of the less-than-wonderful challenges possible. Several of them have been here for many years, and I hope they will continue for many years to come. They are an asset invaluable to the common vision of the Community of Democracies.

I will confess a small degree of envy for the next Secretary General, who will lead the organization into its 25th Anniversary and into a new phase of activism and mission. But just as Secretary General Maria Leissner supported me during my time with the Community of Democracies, I pledge my support to the next Secretary General.

Last but not least, I want to express my deepest gratitude to the Governing Council Members. Your unwavering commitment to the promotion and protection of democracy is the backbone of our organization. Your investment of time and effort in these meetings and in your capitals in democratic solidarity is not only appreciated but also crucial to our shared mission.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to work with you.