

Press Releases: Background Briefing: Previewing the Community of Democracies Governing Council Ministerial

Special Briefing
Senior Administration Official
Via Teleconference
September 13, 2017

MODERATOR: Thank you very much, Justin, and thank you, everyone for joining us today for this background call on the Community of Democracies Governing Council Ministerial, which will be hosted by Secretary Tillerson this Friday, September 15.

On the phone with us today is [Senior Administration Official]. [Senior Administration Official] will be identified as the senior Administration official. This call, of course, is on background and is embargoed until the end of the call.

So now, let me turn it over to [Senior Administration Official], who will make some opening remarks and then take your questions. Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Thanks, [Moderator]. Well, as [Moderator] said, Secretary Tillerson will be hosting a meeting of the Community of Democracies Governing Council on September 15th, this Friday. This ministerial is the culmination of the U.S. presidency of the Community of Democracies. We assumed that presidency in 2015, and it is indeed traditional for the president of the Community of Democracies to hold such a meeting.

The United States was integrally involved in founding the Community of Democracies in June 2000 along with Poland as a vehicle to sustain and strengthen democratic values. And the U.S. continues to be very supportive of the CD's core mission to build a network of governments, legislators, and civil society to sustain and strengthen democratic values.

And why don't I leave it at that.

MODERATOR: All right. We'll now go – take – begin with your questions. So we'll take the first question.

OPERATOR: And just a reminder, it is *1, ladies and gentlemen, if you'd like to queue up here for a question, *1 if you'd like to queue up at this time.

And again, ladies and gentlemen, it is * followed by 1 if you would like to queue up for a question at this moment.

It looks like our first question will come from the line of Conor Finnegan of ABC News. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Hey, thanks very much for holding the call. Just wondering if you can tell us a bit more about what Secretary Tillerson's message will be to these other countries – and I guess more broadly, to the world – about democracy and about what value this administration places on promoting democracy, given his past comments that sometimes those values should be second to national security or economic interests. Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, obviously, I want the Secretary to speak for himself, so I don't want to get ahead of exactly what he will say. But suffice it to say that he will – the message will be loud and clear that democracy is very important not only for its own sake, but for sake – the sake of promoting security, promoting economic prosperity, and generally helping societies to advance.

Over the course of our presidency, we have had three priorities. The first was to promote and protect civil society, especially given the threats to civil society that have grown over the past several years; secondly, to focus on the issue of democracy and security, to demonstrate that democratic means of addressing security challenges are superior to other ways of addressing such challenges; and thirdly, that indeed, democracies do provide for greater stability, security, and economic prosperity over the long term.

MODERATOR: We'll take the next question now. If you have a question, you can queue up.

OPERATOR: Our next question comes from the line of Laura Koran, CNN. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Hi, thanks so much for doing the call. I was wondering if you could walk through a little bit the actual agenda and what meetings the Secretary's likely to have on the sidelines of this event. Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: So I'm not aware of any particular meetings on the sideline – sidelines of the event that the Secretary will be holding, but the Secretary will be offering welcoming remarks to the group at the beginning of the meeting. There will be agenda items dedicated to each of the priorities I identified in the last answer, namely protecting civil society, one; democracy and security, two; and then democracy and development, three.

There will be a high-level lunch as well – working lunch to look specifically at the issue of terrorism and how democracies can best address the challenges of terrorism, and indeed, as I said earlier, why it is that democratic means of addressing terrorism are superior to other means of doing so.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll take the next question now.

OPERATOR: And just a reminder, ladies and gentlemen, it is *1 if you'd like

to queue up. Our next question comes from Alicia Rose of NHK. Your line is open.

QUESTION: Yes, hi, thanks for taking the question. I was wondering if you could offer more information on how many and which countries are participating, at what level, and also what deliverables you're hoping to get out of this meeting.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Thanks for the question. So there are 30 members of the Community of Democracies Governing Council, all of whom will be participating, and then there are 110 other countries that have been invited to participate. The process of selecting those 110 is undertaken by the governing council prior to each ministerial, and through that process, countries' records on democracy are evaluated and invitations are issued based on the governing council's assessment of those countries' most recent record.

Acceptances of the invitations are still coming in, so I don't think I can say definitively who will be coming at this stage. But we have received robust response and we do expect a large number of delegations will be coming, including high-level participants. As well, the Community of Democracies includes a very robust civil society component, and there will be 50 to 100 civil society representatives in the room who will also be participating in the discussion.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Are there additional questions? If so, please register them.

OPERATOR: And at this point, we have no further questions here in queue.

MODERATOR: Very good, then. We thank everyone for participating and thank you very much, [Senior Administration Official], for this overview. The embargo on this call has now been lifted. As a reminder, it is on background to a senior administration official. Thank you very much, everyone, and have a good day.

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