

It is my pleasure to welcome you here today, especially Francis Pym and Leo Tindemans, no strangers to the Alliance, but each here for the first time as Foreign Minister. By the very nature of the democratic political process, ours is a changing group. I am certain we shall come quickly to value the comradeship and counsel of our new colleagues.

When speaking of new colleagues, I would be remiss in not referring to the pending Spanish application to join the Alliance. While the process of their admission is not yet complete, we can all take encouragement from the indications that we shall be able to welcome Spain to the council in Bonn in June.

I should also like to thank the Secretary General and the international staff for the arrangements they have made for the meeting. And finally, my special thanks go to Madame Flesch and the Government of Luxembourg for the warm welcome and outstanding hospitality which is being extended to us. The atmosphere this has created will unquestionably contribute to the success of our meeting.

This Ministerial Session of the North Atlantic Council comes at a serious time, against the background of a disturbing international situation. For example, we cannot but be gravely concerned about the Falkland Islands crisis, where the United Kingdom is defending the basic principle of the non-use of force to settle international disputes. A series of meetings has been scheduled over the next few months which will have an important bearing on the nature of the East-West relationship in the years to come. Our own meeting presents us with the opportunity to lay the groundwork for our Heads of State and Government when they meet in June and for the second United Nations Special Session on Disarmament in New York. These meetings will serve as occasions for taking stock of the present international situation and for exploring the path of future East-West relations.