

Statement by Ambassador Lee Feinstein

On behalf of the American people, I congratulate Poland on the 30th anniversary of the birth of the Solidarity movement. The moral force of the Solidarity movement had ripple effects around the world. It is no exaggeration to say that Poland played a key role both in ending the Cold War and in creating the more democratic world in which we now live.

Today Poland -- and Solidarity -- continue to lead by example. Georgia, Ukraine, and other neighbors to the East look to Poland as a role model. Activists in Cuba study and emulate civil disobedience strategies developed and proven in Poland. Poland is a leader in the Eastern Partnership Initiative to extend good governance to the East and a driving force behind the global Community of Democracies. In fact, experts at U.S. think tanks and universities consider Solidarity and Poland the definitive model for building a mass movement dedicated to peaceful, democratic change. Addressing the Community of Democracies in Krakow last month, Secretary Clinton stressed the important role trade unions and other civil society organizations have played in identifying and eradicating injustices throughout history. By championing the rights of workers, unions promote and defend the fundamental principles on which democratic societies are based. Put simply, unions are essential to political and economic progress, and there is no better example than Solidarity of what a trade union can achieve.

The United States is honored to count Poland as one of its closest friends and allies. At the core of the U.S.-Polish partnership is a deep-seeded commitment to advancing democracy and human rights around the world. As President Obama wrote in his letter which I read at the commemoration in Gdynia, "The Solidarity Movement is a source of inspiration in the fight for liberty for all the world's citizens." As Poland and the United States work together to promote these fundamental values in challenging places like Afghanistan, we look to Solidarity for inspiration. Solidarity's achievements remind us how much can be achieved by a committed few in the face of overwhelming challenges, and Solidarity's legacy inspires us to lend a hand to others as they seek to build their own democratic futures.