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民主進步黨
Democratic Progressive Party, Taiwan

Inaugural Address of President Lai Ching-te



Photo: The Presidential Office of Taiwan

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On the morning of May 20, ROC 16th-term President Lai Ching-te, the First Lady, and Vice President Bi-khim Hsiao attended inaugural celebrations in the plaza fronting the Presidential Office Building. President Lai delivered his inaugural address titled “Building a

democratic, peaceful, and prosperous new Taiwan.”

The following are President Lai’s remarks:

Vice President Bi-khim Hsiao, esteemed heads of state and guests from our allies, distinguished ambassadors and representatives, all visiting dignitaries, dear friends watching live on television and online, fellow citizens across the country: Good morning.

When I was young, I was determined to practice medicine and save lives. When I went into politics, I was determined to transform Taiwan.

Now, standing here, I am determined to strengthen the nation. With an unwavering heart, I accept the responsibility the people have entrusted to me as the 16th-term president of the Republic of China. In accordance with the Republic of China Constitution system, I will take on that solemn responsibility of leading the nation bravely forward.

On this day in 1949, martial law went into effect in Taiwan, and Taiwan plunged into a dark era of authoritarian rule.

On this day in 1996, Taiwan’s first democratically elected president took the oath of office, conveying to the international community that the Republic of China Taiwan is a sovereign, independent nation in which sovereignty lies in the hands of the people.

On this day in 2024, having completed our third transition of political power, Taiwan officially commences, for the first time, the third consecutive term of the same political party in office. We also set sail into a new era that is full of challenges, yet also brimming with limitless hope.

This journey came about as a result of the valiant sacrifices and devotion of the many generations of people of this land. Although it was an arduous one, we made it through.

Now, we not only witness the beginning of a new administration, but also usher in another hard-earned victory for democracy.

Many people have interpreted my and Vice President Bi-khim Hsiao’s election victory as “breaking the eight-year curse,” referring to the fact that no political party has been able to remain in office for over two terms. But the reality is that in a democracy, the people have the final

say. There is no such thing as a “curse” in any election. It is simply that the people put the ruling party under the toughest of tests, choosing the nation’s future in the most genuine way.

I want to thank former President Tsai Ing-wen, former Vice President Chen Chien-jen, and the administrative team for their hard work over these past eight years. You have all helped build a solid base for Taiwan’s development. Let’s give them a big round of applause!

I also want to thank my fellow citizens once again for your support, for refusing to be swayed by external forces, for resolutely defending democracy, for pressing onward without turning back, and for turning a new page in Taiwan’s history.

Every day of my term, I will strive to prove myself as someone in whom you can trust and count on, by acting justly, showing mercy, and being humble, and by treating our people as family. The new administration will work tirelessly and to the best of our ability, as all the nation’s people put us to the test. We will also pursue continuous reform, shaping a new face for Taiwanese politics.

I. Coordination and cooperation between the executive and legislative branches to advance national policy

In February this year, a new Legislative Yuan was sworn in. This is the first time in 16 years that no party has an absolute majority. In the face of this new political landscape, some are feeling anticipation, while others are anxious.

I want to say to everyone, that this new structure is a result of the people’s choice. Looking at it with a different frame of mind, a lack of absolute majority means that the ruling and opposition parties are now all able to share their ideas, and that we will be undertaking the nation’s challenges as one.

However, Taiwan’s people have high expectations for rational governance among political parties. Apart from competition, parties should also believe in cooperation. Only then can the nation continue down a stable path.

The Legislative Yuan should observe procedural justice. The majority should respect the minority, while the minority accepts majority rule. Only then can we avoid conflict and maintain a stable and harmonious

society.

In a democratic society, the interests of the people come first – that is the root of democracy. Likewise, national interests come before the interests of parties – that is the sacred duty of each political party. When ruling or opposition parties put forth legislation that conforms with our Constitution; when we uphold the spirit of “people above all” and “nation above party,” national policy will naturally and smoothly progress.

Premier Cho Jung-tai (卓榮泰) will lead the cabinet, and prioritize solving issues which benefit society and reflect consensus among ruling and opposition parties. He will respond to public opinion and address the issues people care about with proactive efforts and innovative thinking, and thus serve the people of Taiwan.

Today, recovery work following the April 3 earthquake is still underway. I would like to once again express my sympathy and condolences to the victims and their families. I also want to thank all our citizens who have assisted in the earthquake response and reconstruction efforts, as well as the international community for their concern and support.

The central government has already drawn up plans to funnel NT\$28.55 billion into reconstruction and industry stimulus. This will help the people of Hualien return to their normal lives as quickly as possible.

I have high hopes for the future of cooperation between the central and local governments, as well as coordination between the executive and legislative branches. I also hope to work hard alongside all the people of Taiwan to further entrench our democracy, maintain peace in the Indo-Pacific, and boost global prosperity.

II. Democratic Taiwan as a global beacon

My fellow citizens: Democracy, peace, and prosperity form Taiwan’s national roadmap. And they are also our links to the world.

As an important link in the global chain of democracies, a glorious era of Taiwan’s democracy has arrived.

Since Taiwan first held direct presidential elections, we have grown to

become one of the world's most vibrant democracies. We have continued to enhance human rights, and show the world our values of democracy and freedom.

Taiwan was the first country in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage.

Taiwan showed that democracy outperforms authoritarianism in fighting the pandemic.

Whether in terms of democracy or freedom, Taiwan is consistently highly ranked among Asian nations. Democratic Taiwan is already a global beacon. And this honor belongs to all the people of Taiwan.

As we move forward, my administration will continue using Taiwan's democratic vitality as a force for good, to promote national development and deepen international cooperation.

In terms of internal affairs, I will value meritocracy, and uphold honesty and diligence. I will practice democratic governance, and establish an open government. In the spirit of transparency and rule by the people, I encourage the populace to participate in public policy, and will continue to promote a voting age of 18. Together, we will fulfill our vision for our nation.

As for international affairs, we will continue working with other democratic nations to form a democratic community, and share our experiences across a range of fields. We will work together to combat disinformation, strengthen democratic resilience, address challenges, and allow Taiwan to become the MVP of the democratic world.

III. Democratic Taiwan as a pilot for global peace

Peace is priceless, and war has no winners. Next year, we will mark the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. As with other nations, Taiwan walked a difficult path for post-war revitalization, before getting to where we are today. No one wants these achievements to be destroyed by war.

Today, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and conflict between Israel and Hamas continue to shake the whole world. And China's military actions and gray-zone coercion are considered the greatest strategic challenges to global peace and stability.

Taiwan is strategically positioned in the first island chain, and what affects us here affects global geopolitical development. Even as early as 1921, Chiang Wei-shui (蔣渭水) said that Taiwan is a frontline guardian of world peace. Now, in 2024, Taiwan's role is even more significant.

There is already a strong international consensus, that peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait are indispensable to global security and prosperity.

To adapt to today's complicated international landscape, countries around the world have been actively cooperating to maintain regional peace and stability.

Just last month, the United States made into law the Indo-Pacific Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024. This will provide the Indo-Pacific region with additional security and assistance, thereby supporting the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait.

We thank nations around the world for their consideration and support for Taiwan. We would also like to declare to all that democracy and freedom are Taiwan's unwavering commitments. Peace is the only option. And prosperity, gained through lasting peace and stability, is our objective.

The future of cross-strait relations will have a decisive impact on the world. This means that we, who have inherited a democratic Taiwan, are pilots for peace. Our government will uphold the Four Commitments, neither yield nor provoke, and maintain the status quo.

I also want to call on China to cease their political and military intimidation against Taiwan, share with Taiwan the global responsibility of maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait as well as the greater region, and ensure the world is free from the fear of war.

Taiwanese are a peace-loving people who treat others with kindness. I have always believed that if the leader of a country puts the people's welfare above all, then peace in the Taiwan Strait, mutual benefits, and prosperous coexistence would be common goals.

Therefore, I hope that China will face the reality of the Republic of China's existence, respect the choices of the people of Taiwan, and in good faith, choose dialogue over confrontation, exchange over

containment, and under the principles of parity and dignity, engage in cooperation with the legal government chosen by Taiwan's people. This can start from the resumption of tourism on a reciprocal basis, and enrollment of degree students in Taiwanese institutions. Let us together pursue peace and mutual prosperity.

My fellow citizens: As we pursue the ideal of peace, we must not harbor any delusions. So long as China refuses to renounce the use of force against Taiwan, all of us in Taiwan ought to understand, that even if we accept the entirety of China's position and give up our sovereignty, China's ambition to annex Taiwan will not simply disappear.

In face of the many threats and attempts of infiltration from China, we must demonstrate our resolution to defend our nation, and we must also raise our defense awareness and strengthen our legal framework for national security. This means actively promoting the Four Pillars of Peace action plan: strengthened national defense; improved economic security; stable and principled cross-strait leadership; and values-based diplomacy. By standing side-by-side with other democratic countries, we can form a peaceful global community that can demonstrate the strength of deterrence and prevent war, achieving our goal of peace through strength.

IV. Democratic Taiwan as a force for global prosperity

Taiwan needs the world, just as the world needs Taiwan. Taiwan is not just opening a door to the world – Taiwan is already on the world's center stage.

As we look toward our future, we know that semiconductors will be indispensable. And the AI wave has already swept in. Taiwan has already mastered advanced semiconductor manufacturing, and we stand at the center of the AI revolution. We are a key player in supply chains for global democracies. For these reasons, Taiwan has an influence on global economic development, as well as humanity's well-being and prosperity.

My fellow citizens: The future of the Republic of China Taiwan will be decided by its 23 million people. The future we decide is not just the future of our nation, but the future of the world.

We must walk on the right path, and our industries must make every effort, so that we may be a force for global prosperity. With every step

forward that Taiwan takes, the world takes a step forward with us.

When I served as premier and vice president, I visited the various industries throughout Taiwan. I know well what our industry needs, and also what it is capable of. So, going forward, the government, working closely with the private sector, will take a threefold approach to further Taiwan's development.

The first is having a clear view for our future, and making Taiwan smart and sustainable.

As we face the dangers of climate change, we must be resolved in our transition to net-zero emissions by the year 2050. As we meet the global challenges of adopting more and more smart technologies, we in Taiwan, a "silicon island," must do all we can to expedite Taiwan's transformation into an "AI island." We must adapt AI for industry and step up the pace of AI innovation and applications. We must also adapt industry for AI and use AI's computational power to make our nation, our military, our workforce, and our economy stronger.

It is similarly crucial that we develop an economic model driven by innovation. Through our two-pronged approach of promoting digital transformation and net-zero transition, we will assist small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as they upgrade and transform, and we will seek inclusive growth, so as to create a new Taiwan that is smarter and more sustainable – a second Taiwan Miracle.

While we invest in innovation and nurture the next hidden champions, we must also make bold investments in quantum computing, robotics, the metaverse, precision medicine, and other advanced technologies, thus giving our young people the opportunity to pursue their dreams and solidifying Taiwan's leading position in the future global landscape.

The second is setting our sights on the space industry while further developing our strengths as a maritime nation.

Our sights are set on making Taiwan the Asian hub of UAV supply chains for global democracies, and developing the next generation of medium- and low-orbit communications satellites, bringing Taiwan's space and aerospace industries squarely into the international sphere.

At the same time, we will also explore and develop our strengths as a

maritime nation, deepen our connections with the ocean, and invest more in marine science and technology research, thereby driving the development of our maritime industries. Altogether, this will make Taiwan a much stronger nation, and it will open up new horizons for the development of Taiwan's economy and industry. The possibilities are truly limitless.

The third is to help our enterprises expand their presence and market internationally.

Taiwan has officially applied to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and we will continue to engage actively in regional economic integration. We will endeavor to sign bilateral investment agreements with other democracies around the world and further deepen our trade partnerships. We will also work to resolve the carbon tax issue and thus open the path for further industrial development.

Taiwan must hold firm its key position in the global supply chain and seize the business opportunities that come as a result of geopolitical changes. We aim to develop Five Trusted Industry Sectors, namely semiconductors, AI, military, security and surveillance, and next-generation communications; we also aim to improve the investment environment, welcome Taiwanese businesses abroad to come back and invest in Taiwan, and encourage local firms to expand their investments and set even deeper roots here in Taiwan.

Here today, I want to assure our friends from all different sectors: Just as you all are committed to be the best in your respective areas, the government is also committed to providing assistance so that you can expand your global presence and international markets from a solid base here in Taiwan.

Taiwan is eminently capable of being a thriving global economic powerhouse. Wherever the sun shines around the world, there are Taiwanese companies stimulating local development, while also enriching the livelihoods of the Taiwanese people.

V. Sympathizing with the joys and the concerns of the people

It is my firm belief that the fruits of economic development ought to be enjoyed by all the people of our nation. In the coming days of my presidency, I will launch the National Project of Hope and expand

investment in society, through which I aim to shape a Taiwanese society with more love and moral courage. It will be a society in which young people have a vision of hope, people in their prime have the means to realize their dreams, the elderly can enjoy their days in happiness, and the disadvantaged can find the care they need. A society in which all people, at every stage of life, will be able to receive from the government the support they need.

Childcare, long-term care, and social housing services will continue to be expanded. Prices of commodities and housing, as well as the wealth gap, will be addressed. The safety and security of our food, our roads, our schools, and our social safety net will all be enhanced. And our reform efforts in education, the judicial system, and transitional justice will continue.

I understand the concerns and expectations of the people of Taiwan. As to the issues you are concerned with and the reform society needs, the government will do its utmost to achieve solutions.

Everyone is working hard for higher pay. I will work to drive industrial upgrading and create an even better wage environment.

Everyone is hoping for more effective public safety. I will crack down on corruption and organized crime, guns, drugs, and fraud.

Everyone is wanting a stable supply of electricity. I will initiate our second energy transition, push for the development of more forms of green energy and smart grids, and help to make our electrical power generation system more resilient.

Everyone is concerned about the financing of labor insurance. I repeat here today: Labor insurance will not fail under our government.

Everyone is stressing the importance of transportation safety. I will help create a human-friendly transportation environment, putting an end to Taiwan's bad reputation as a "pedestrian hell."

Everyone is hoping that the government can help lighten the load for family caregivers and work to solve the labor shortage issue. I will do my utmost to arrive at solutions.

All of us, as we walk into the future, want a more resilient Taiwan, a Taiwan that can respond adequately to such crises as infectious disease

and natural disasters, a Taiwan that can quicken the pace of urban renewal and the repair of dilapidated and dangerous old buildings.

All of us are also hoping for a healthier Taiwan. With my own expertise in medicine, I hope to bring together the strengths of other fields to beat cancer. I will establish a ministry of physical education and sports development to bring sports and athletics more into the lives of the people. I will also ensure that our National Health Insurance system remains sustainable, which will help our people live longer and healthier.

The Taiwan of tomorrow will preserve its diverse ecosystem, its diverse ethnic culture, and achieve sustainability, to create a better nation.

The Taiwan of tomorrow will have a more diverse innovation economy, a more widespread use of digital technology applications; it will be more competitive and bilingual; it will have a stronger public support service system; it will be more respectful of gender equality; it will ensure that the people are guaranteed their rights.

The Taiwan of tomorrow will allow each municipality to develop out of its own unique characteristics and promote revitalization of local industries; we will achieve the goal of a Taiwan with balanced development where all can live and work in peace and happiness.

VI. With greater solidarity, we become stronger as a nation

My dear compatriots, each and every one of you contributes a necessary part to our future development. In this era of globalization and wide-ranging competition, no one country can go it alone; and no society, if it is divided within, can successfully meet these challenges.

If we are united, we can walk with more confident strides. And when we support one another, our steps will take us further. For our nation to endure and progress, I will bring us together through the strength of democracy, for greater solidarity and a stronger nation.

I think it is apparent to us all: We have a nation insofar as we have sovereignty. Right in the first chapter of our Constitution, it says that “The sovereignty of the Republic of China shall reside in the whole body of citizens,” and that “Persons possessing the nationality of the Republic of China shall be citizens of the Republic of China.” These two articles tell us clearly: The Republic of China and the People’s Republic

of China are not subordinate to each other. All of the people of Taiwan must come together to safeguard our nation; all our political parties ought to oppose annexation and protect sovereignty; and no one should entertain the idea of giving up our national sovereignty in exchange for political power.

As more countries around the world publicly express their support for Taiwan's meaningful international participation, there is increasing proof that Taiwan is a Taiwan of the world; that Taiwan is a worthy and reliable force for global peace and prosperity.

So long as we identify with Taiwan, Taiwan belongs to us all – all of the peoples of Taiwan, regardless of ethnicity, irrespective of when we arrived. Some call this land the Republic of China, some call it the Republic of China Taiwan, and some, Taiwan; but whichever of these names we ourselves or our international friends choose to call our nation, we will resonate and shine all the same. So let us overcome our differences and stride forward, with our shared aspirations, to meet the world.

VII. Taiwan greeting a new world, the world greeting a new Taiwan

As Taiwan engages more closely with the rest of the world, we welcome the world to come closer to Taiwan. Many new residents and foreign nationals have come and made Taiwan their home, writing a new chapter in Taiwan's story. To all of you, I give my sincere thanks and respect.

Here today are many friends who have come quite a long way from their countries to join us. And many overseas compatriots are also here showing their support with their presence. So, why don't we let them all know how much we appreciate their support? Please give them a round of applause!

Tonight we will be welcoming our distinguished guests at a state banquet in Tainan, the city where 1624 marked Taiwan's links to globalization. Now, as we stand here 400 years after that historical moment in Tainan, we in Taiwan must all demonstrate confidence and bravely set course for the new world, so that the world may embrace a new Taiwan.

On that note, I want to ask each fellow citizen to praise our mother Taiwan, the land that nurtures and supports us all, and to work

together to protect her, honor her, let the world embrace her, and allow her the international respect she deserves as a great nation.

Thank you.

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