

**Opening speech by Prime Minister Mark Rutte at the presentation of the Four Freedoms Awards 2014 in Middelburg on 24 May 2014**

Your Majesties,  
Your Royal Highnesses,  
Distinguished laureates,  
Mr King's Commissioner,  
Ms Roosevelt,  
Your Excellencies,  
ladies and gentlemen,

The four freedoms that we honour today are fundamental and universal.  
They apply to everyone, everywhere, at all times.  
At least, that's how it should be.  
Sadly, in reality, it depends on where and when you were born.

In our part of Europe we will soon be commemorating the 70th anniversary of D-Day, 6 June 1944.

A date recorded in golden letters in the book of freedom and the rule of law.

A special date here, too, in Zeeland, the scene of the Battle of the Scheldt, one of the most brutal clashes of the Second World War.

We now live in freedom thanks to the sacrifice and courage of the allied heroes, for which we are forever grateful.

But this is our reality.

Only a few hundred kilometres to the east, the liberation was short-lived.

True freedom only came within reach decades later.

On 6 November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, changing the lives of millions behind the Iron Curtain.

This year we also mark that historic moment 25 years ago.

And we do so knowing that the four freedoms which President Franklin D. Roosevelt said were essential to human dignity are still not part of everyone's daily reality.

In the history of mankind, freedom is almost never a gift.

It must be fought for by people and organisations with the courage to stand up for their principles and convictions, even in the face of great difficulty.

Like today's winners of the Four Freedoms Award and all the laureates before them. They deserve our highest praise and deepest respect.

I've noticed that the stories of most of the Four Freedoms laureates are about the future.

About freedom and legal certainty as conditions for progress for people, countries and regions.

We will hear more of their stories today.

Stories about education and opportunities for development.

About health and wellbeing for all.

About building a democratic and peaceful society, where everyone feels safe and has economic security.

All of these concepts are linked.

Or as President Roosevelt said:

*'True individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made.'*

Ladies and gentlemen, in 1940 President Roosevelt called the Netherlands 'a great democracy' and 'one of the earliest of all the democracies in the world'.

His praise was a testimony to the special relationship between the United States and our country.

A bond that was also reflected in the close personal friendship he and his wife Eleanor had with members of our Royal House.

In the Netherlands, we cherish this transatlantic friendship and we're proud that the presentation of the Four Freedoms Awards has had a Dutch tint from the beginning. Since the days of Hugo Grotius, our country has been known worldwide as a firm advocate for the rule of law and a centre of international law and international security.

And we are committed to actively fulfilling that role, as we recently did when we proudly hosted the Nuclear Security Summit.

In his famous State of the Union address of 6 January 1941, President Roosevelt said:

*'Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere. Our support goes to those who struggle to gain those rights or keep them. Our strength is our unity of purpose.'*

These words still inspire us today.

Like you, today's laureates, who put them into practice with your actions and make a difference for countless others.

Today, your exceptional efforts are being justly recognised.

And today your message of hope will be heard round the world.

Thank you.