

Ladies and gentlemen,

The firm ambition of the diamond sector to commit itself more than ever in the broader community as one of the pillars of the strategic plan pleases me a lot. Indeed, the firm integration of the sector in the city and the region is of major importance. Your aim and offer for a good **dialogue, cooperation and cross-pollination** will benefit all of us.

Of course, we are well aware of the fact that your sector has its very **specific characteristics**. It fulfills a very **specific role** as well in our economy as in our community. A specific role also means **specific responsibilities**, as well from the sector itself, from the governments as from the larger community.

Therefore, it is great that one of the key objectives of the Antwerp Diamond Plan is to create the preconditions for and to contribute to a **broadened ownership** and **shared proud**.

The Antwerp diamond sector should also aim to be the heart of the community and in the heart of its people.

How?

By creating **display locations** as well as **display moments: locations and moments** that offer the **broad public** the opportunity to get **acquainted** with a sector that is perceived as **rather closed**.

As a **province**, we have been contributing to this **community integration process** for almost **50 years**. This year, **the Antwerp provincial Diamond Museum** is celebrating its **40th anniversary** as well as 10 years of accommodation at the Queen Astrid Square. But due to the **Zoo Masterplan**, that includes our museum site, our museum will have to **close its doors temporarily**.

- o Fortunately, in the **short term** –as from today on- the **MAS-diamond pavilion** will offer **a new and vibrant display opportunity**. Last year, the Antwerp diamond industry established a **structural and strategic partnership** with the MAS, the most visited museum of Belgium. The **Antwerp Provincial Diamond Museum** works closely together with the AWDC on this project, as our museum is responsible for the exhibition layout of the pavilion.
- o Another short term display opportunity will be the **annual 'open house days'** organised by AWDC. Those open house days will coincide with the wider **Belgian 'open company days'**. They will contribute to the opening up of the diamond sector to the Antwerp public, thus eliminating the sectors image of being a rather closed community.

But **community integration** is not a process that is realized overnight. In order to strengthen and support the process, the strategic plan also includes some medium-long terms:

- o The first defines the **visual improvement of the diamond district and its surrounding streets**. At this very moment, the visual impression and general aesthetics of the district are poor. The city is taking this concern into account. The city is integrating an **upgrade of the diamond district** in her **urban planning**. Without any doubt, a more attractive, modern diamond district will **improve and enhance the position of the diamonds** as a **valuable** element of **Antwerp's city and region experience**.
- o Another term that will contribute to the process of community integration, is the establishment of a **visitors centre**. A well designed **visitors centre** would significantly raise the profile of the sector in the city and the region. Currently, the province of Antwerp and other important stakeholders and different tourism representatives are collaborating on a **renewed** and expanded **concept for the Antwerp Provincial Diamond Museum**. It's part of the **provincial Museum Masterplan**, for everybody needs a masterplan these days. The concept is due to be finished by mid - 2012.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To conclude, it is a **great opportunity** that the Antwerp Diamond Masterplan identifies a valuable range of initiatives **to draw the diamond sector and the wider social community much closer together**. I am very glad to see that the diamond sector is keen to tighten these connections in Antwerp for the benefit of the broader community. As I said, all of us will **gain enormously by the strengthening of these relations, dialogue, cooperation and cross-pollination**.