

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome in Antwerp, welcome to the **world's diamond capital**. Today, we fully live up to this unique reputation, hosting the **36th World Diamond Congress**. Throughout history, Antwerp has always been a **meeting place for international contacts**: a stimulating place for creative and innovative ideas and the top address for exchanging them. I hope and have a strong belief that this will be no different today and the following days.

In addition, Antwerp has always played a **key role in the history of diamonds**, ever since the 15th century. Recently, the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme Annual Report (KPCS) has confirmed Antwerp's leading position as the **world's prime diamond trading hub**. No wonder, if you know that all the key elements in the industry are concentrated in this city: Antwerp is home to an **impressive cluster of diamond professionals** such as the world's largest mining companies, bankers, over 1800 individual diamond dealers, outstanding polishers with excellent knowledge and expertise, as well as a front-running knowledge centre.

The diamond sector is an important ambassador for Belgium. It is even one of its **economic mainstays**. More than 80 per cent of the world's rough diamonds, 50 per cent of the cut diamonds and 40 per cent of the industrial diamonds are traded in Antwerp. Diamonds represent 8per cent of total exports from Flanders, and 5 per cent of Belgium's total exports. Equally important and enriching, the diamond community in Antwerp adds greatly to the **international and cosmopolitan character of our region**. We are proud of the **diversity of the sector**, where over 70 nationalities with the most diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds work together in perfect harmony. A multicultural society benefits us all: knowledge, insights and valuable experiences can be exchanged. Openness, a good dose of empathy, mutual respect and positive commitment and engagement are key ingredients for success.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These values are likewise indispensable when it comes to doing business. I am pleased to say that Antwerp's diamond sector is a **prime example of good business practices**, translating these values into practice. Today, the sector must focus on important and essential issues such as **transparency, compliance, Corporate Social Responsibility and innovation. By means of the Diamond Masterplan 2020**, AWDC together with the entire sector, consolidate and enhance the position of Antwerp as the world's prime diamond hub. Together, they tackle topics such as anti-money laundering measures, to continue reinforcing the high standards of the Antwerp diamond sector. I am confident in promoting Antwerp as an **example for other diamond centres to follow**.

In this regard, I want to applaud the WFDB on establishing **the World Diamond Mark**. This quality mark aims to instill confidence in the diamond business. I am convinced that it will create positive commercial advantages as well.

Earlier this year, together with AWDC, Antwerp launched a quality label as well: **Antwerp's Most Brilliant**. This label is awarded to the most qualitative and reliable jewellers in Antwerp. To receive this label, a jeweller must meet 32 strict quality requirements, such as the highest standards in terms of sustainability, safety, ethics, transparency, service and company stability.

Both those initiatives represent the **way forward in the evolution of the global diamond industry**. At the same time, they present a series of challenges, challenges that you -the experts- will be addressing and discussing during the next days.

To conclude, I want to thank you for your interest and your participation in this event, for being so numerous present here in Antwerp. I also want to thank the World Federation of Diamond Bourses, International Diamond Manufacturers Association and all the partners for their efforts and hard work to put this event together. Let us **cherish and seize the valuable opportunities, challenges and endless possibilities** that our diamonds bring about, now and in the future.