

Welcoming at the CSR Night / Time4Society

26th of March 2015

Your excellency, (ambassador Puri /India)

Minister, (Kris Peeters)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“This country is in need of risk-takers. The number of business start-ups is at record lows. We need people who dare to dream of new projects, new technologies, new business models, and, as well, **of a better world.**” I read those words in a magazine about entrepreneurship, published by the newspaper *De Tijd*. I could not agree more.

The accelerating pace and scope of globalization is bringing about profound challenges, for all economic activities. In general, **expectations of business conduct are rising all over the world**, sparking a growing debate about its translation into concrete corporate behaviour. There is increasing focus on the private and public sectors **to be proactive in the area of CSR**. This creates various challenges for our entrepreneurs: not only the financial figures are important, but relevant topics such as business ethics, human rights and social performance, health and safety and environmental compliance are –fortunately- gaining importance as well.

Together with my colleagues of the Antwerp Province council, we try our very best **to create leverages for our people and companies** to make a successful transition to a sustainable society. The question is not only about what the authorities can or must do. Everybody should be triggered by the question **what he or she, his or her company, organisation or institution can do for the planet's as well as the society's FUTURE** and consequently, for his or her children and grand-children.

In order to support and encourage our SME's and companies to commit themselves to environmental and sustainable initiatives, the Chambers of Commerce Kempen and Mechelen together with the Antwerp province **launched the CSR/Environment charter**. Initially, the focus of the Environment Charter was exclusively upon environmental issues: encouraging companies to underwrite an environmental charter with specific sustainability goals. Furthermore, our province focused on developing and gradually implementing the ISO 14001 standard environmental management system.

But regarding the new trends and developments in corporate behaviour, a **new chapter on CSR was included in the charter**. Main goal is to stimulate and underline the proactive efforts of our companies, regarding environmental, people-oriented and socially-oriented activities. With success, since numerous companies obtained the charter so far.

Luckily, the overall awareness regarding CSR is massively increasing. Various stakeholders, organisations, and authorities are making efforts to promote, to encourage and to facilitate the implementation of CSR-standards. I strongly support the activities and vision of Times4Society, for I am convinced this is the way to go forward. CSR must become an integral part of corporate's strategies, resulting in companies that **genuinely care for the environment, society and people**. To all the CEO's present: Remember the wise words of Henry David Thoreau: "Goodness is the only investment that never fails".

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sustainability -most broadly defined- means **protecting the environment** while also at the same time, **elevating the social and economic status of everyone in the community**. Sustainability will improve our lives and the lives of our children. Therefore, I would like to thank Time4Society for their highly-valued initiatives and efforts.

And, of course, thanks to all the companies present here: it is fantastic to hear and to read about all the **good practices** in the field of creating a sustainable and eco-efficient region.

All the best of luck in your future sustainable activities.