

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

Welcome to The Hague, a world city by the sea!

What better place to hold this international event than here on the North Sea shore? It is the gateway to the world.

What's more, our perspective is not limited solely to our neighbours across the North Sea, the British. The very name of this hotel – Atlantic – is testament to the fact that we look far beyond our immediate environment 😊

We may be a small country, but our reach extends far afield.

Indeed, the two are inextricably linked.

Wherever you live in the Netherlands, you are never far away from abroad. Within no more than a two-hour drive, people already speak a different language.

We cannot do without our good neighbours and distant friends.

That may sound a little depressing, but in fact it is not.

We have succeeded in transforming a sense of dependency into a challenge. We have ventured out to discover and explore the world. We are world citizens, born and bred. And the city of The Hague is the standard bearer for this internationalism.

Globally, The Hague has a reputation as being the legal capital of the world. This year, we are celebrating the centenary of the Peace Palace. It is home to the International Court of Justice, the United Nations' court.

On Tuesday of this week, we held the pile-driving ceremony to mark the start of construction of the new International Criminal Court.

And on Monday the 8th of April, UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon attended the conference of the OPCW, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

The Hague has never been surrounded by city walls, a fact that has always worked in our favour. At a time when globalisation is as high on the agenda as it is now, having an international orientation is essential for a city's survival.

We can build on the basis that has been constructed over the last centuries. These are very solid foundations. The Hague, international city of Peace and Justice, attracts people to the city.

We are home to around 30,000 expats, and each of these creates employment for the city. They play an important role in our economy.

Expats are not foreigners, they are friends. That is the way we like to see it and we believe that friends deserve to be welcomed properly.

Being a good host involves providing medical care, entertainment and nightlife and a good selection of retail opportunities. It also means providing good education, which brings me to you.

I would like to congratulate the European Council of National Associations of Independent Schools. It is the organisation behind this conference. The ECNAIS celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. As an organisation, you bring together 23 European countries in a network of 25,000 (twenty-five thousand) schools.

Your reach extends to as many as 5.3 million people working in education.

There are keynote speakers here from the United Kingdom, Chile and Australia. It promises to be a great conference.

The thing that unites all of us is a passion for education. You refer to schools as *reservoirs of hope*. I agree wholeheartedly with that description.

Good education focuses on the total personality of the student. More than ever before, education must offer students the space they need to develop to the full.

The times in which we live call for people with a capacity to think. Education that concentrates on teaching factual knowledge is a thing of the past.

The world is changing at a rapid pace and we need to teach children to be flexible from an early age: in order to ensure that they can adapt to changing circumstances. It is a natural human capacity, but one which needs to be developed through education.

We need to teach our children more than cognitive skills alone. To borrow a phrase from German: “Bildung muss sein”.

The humanities have all but disappeared from the curriculum, unjustly in my view. Formative subjects, such as philosophy and literature, enrich you as a person. They provide you with the baggage you need to pursue life in the 21st century.

The world of the future will be determined by what we teach our children today.

Not long ago, I saw a 10-year-old boy. He was playing football on his computer with a boy sitting at a computer in Tokyo. Will he be allowed to learn at school about the kind of culture in which that boy is growing up? As far as I’m concerned, it is not a question of being allowed to: it is an absolute necessity.

It is about that global perspective. This is something that we actively encourage here in the city of The Hague. We invest in it, even in times of economic adversity. Because we refuse to compromise on the future of the city. If we give up on that, we are lost.

The fact that The Hague leads the way in terms of international education in the Netherlands is no coincidence. The British School, the French School, and the International School in Kijkduin: we are home to all of these.

And the International Baccalaureate recently opened its regional office here. They set the agenda for good international education in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. It is the result of years of lobbying, in which the Municipality of The Hague played an instrumental role.

All of these efforts are focused on good international primary and secondary education. But we also have ambitions for education at university level.

Those of you who came here by train will have seen alongside Central Station the beginnings of the Leiden University College The Hague. Around 600 students will soon be living and working here on a study programme relating to the international issues of peace and justice.

And the good thing about it is that the students will not spend all their time with their heads in books. Here in The Hague, they will be at the heart of institutions that spend 365 days of the year focusing on international justice.

The investments I have outlined offer opportunities for the children of employees from abroad and for foreign students. But I also believe it is essential that other, traditional schools of The Hague also recognise and seize the opportunities offered by this international city.

Today's world is all about working together. Anyone who does not cooperate will fail. In The Hague, we have an advantage that we intend to build upon, in the interests of a future generation. Here in the city of The Hague we are all in agreement: in government and in education.

It is the rationale behind the launch of the Hague Bridge ('de Haagse brug') programme. As part of this, regular primary and secondary schools engage with international schools. These are occasional, but highly valuable, encounters.

Many secondary schools also have exchange programmes with schools abroad, often with the support of the Municipality of The Hague.

At times, we depart from national policy, as in the case of the introduction of bilingual education. In primary education, we aim to offer schools that opportunity. We do this in other areas too, such as higher professional education and university education. The continuous learning path (*doorlopende leerlijn*)...we continue to lobby the ministry on this important issue.

Ladies and gentlemen. I will not take up any more of your time. There are some impressive speakers awaiting you this morning.

What we are missing here today are the students themselves. But we must not lose sight of their needs.

*New landscapes for Independent Schools*; this is what you intend to explore today. But you should take care to avoid any illusions.

Do not pursue utopia, places where our children will never end up, but focus on what matters to today's young people.

School as a place that provides the space you need to develop your talents. A place that challenges you to bring out the best in yourself.

This offers an unmissable opportunity and a shared challenge for us all.

I wish you the very best of success and, of course, an enjoyable and productive stay in The Hague.