

Ladies and gentlemen,

From the **15th century** on, Antwerp is the **diamond centre of the world**. It is the result of **hard work** and **sheer determination of successive generations**. And what is more, the companies and organisations of our Antwerp diamond industry have always been **versatile enough to adapt to change**. Nevertheless, profound **challenges and threats** might affect Antwerp's unique position as the world's diamond capital.

In 2009, **several key players** of the diamond industry shared their **concerns** with me. I sensed their urge for **change** and their desire to establish a **solid and shared vision for the future** and elaborate a **strategy** to realise it.

Their strong appeal motivated and inspired me to **facilitate** the repositioning exercise with the sector.

I remembered the **first meeting** at the province house with **all the diamond stake holders** as if it was yesterday. Not bogged down by any knowledge of the sector I bluntly and naively asked many questions and expressed some expectations.

After an extensive enquiry "inside out" and "outside in", **Jan Callebaut** presented a rather confronting analysis. That was the very tough phase.

Under the **dynamic leadership** of your president **Nishit Parikh** and CEO **Ari Epstein** of AWDC a strong **steering committee** was formed. The seeds of an ambitious Antwerp Diamond Masterplan were sown. Katharine Lamont and there after Marcel Pruwer took excellent care of the project's counseling.

This steering committee functioned as an **incubator** for many ideas and initiatives. Problems were identified, solutions discussed and new business areas targeted. At the same time a strong plea for a competitive fiscal operating template, was elaborated. That is urgent to compete successfully with emerging markets like India, Dubai or Botswana.

I am so glad that this process has been straightforward in tackling important and essential issues such as **transparency, compliance, individual responsibility, CSR and innovation that is driven by new technology**. The result of all this hard work is a **bold, brave and ambitious statement** from a sector that sees itself as winning the battle for its future in Antwerp.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since the very beginning of the project and especially today, I am very **proud and grateful**.

Grateful towards the **entire sector, to all of you!** You took part in a strategic process to **consolidate, enhance and redefine the position of Antwerp** in a world which is **changing fast and profoundly**. Also for the diamond business. Grateful towards all the **key players and stakeholders**: first of all AWDC, the city of Antwerp and vice mayor Van Campenhout, Jan Callebaut, Katharine Lamont, Marcel Pruwer, and of course all the other –often very critical- **representatives and partners of the diamond industry** who played a crucial role.

The **clear** mission, the **strong, shared, positive and ambitious vision**, with a clear focus upon **innovation, professionalism and transparency**, is an excellent way **forward**, for the diamond industry, for Antwerp.

Let us cherish this, so that the **reputation and the image of the diamond in Antwerp**, in our region and country can become at least as excellent as **the very positive and worldwide reputation of Antwerp as the world's diamond capital**. A reputation and position that we are widely envied for.

Here in Antwerp, we have inherited an impressive diamond past; now, it is up to all of us to create an as impressive future. Together we will succeed!