

Speech for Honorary Consuls, “An open mind to the world”, The Hague, 12 June 2012.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The urge to travel the world has a long tradition in Dutch history. It is no coincidence that New York was originally called New Amsterdam. That Australia was first named New Holland. When I was in Chile, I talked with some friends about Cape Horn. Cape Horn was discovered by the Dutchman Jacob Lemaire and named after the Dutch city Hoorn. And for hundreds of years, until far into the nineteenth century, there was only one foreign trading post in Japan. It was, as you can imagine, Dutch.

This last example is particularly telling. The Netherlands is a trading nation and the world has always been our market. The entire world, I would say. Self-evidently, Honorary Consuls, you do know that. You experience it every day again.

You, who help our fellow Dutchmen in distress, like the Dutchman who was arrested during a kidney transplant in Lahore, Pakistan. Honorary consul Tariq Rehman went to great lengths and spent hours in the hospital to assure proper medical treatment for this patient.

You, who spread and preserve Dutch culture all over the world. Arnie de la Porte, Honorary Consul in Cleveland, the US, is one of the driving forces behind the preservation of the USS Cod, an American submarine that rescued the crew of a stranded Dutch submarine during the Second World War.

And you, who work tirelessly at promoting Dutch trade interests, from Chile to China. Jeroen van Duin, for instance, who arranged an excellent meeting with Dutch business in Brunei, when I was there for a summit. He indeed was able to invite the Minister of Energy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

You are all aware that **tectonic** changes are taking place in the world. We have seen the consequences of the global financial crisis, which hit hardest in the West. But it was also the catalyst for an even more influential development: the geopolitical world is in flux. We've seen economic growth in Brazil, Russia, India, South Africa and – above all – China. By now, no single country or bloc of countries is monopolizing the international agenda. It's for sure things are changing in the world. Let's probe into this for a moment.

The international focus has moved away from Europe towards the Pacific. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton claims that the future of America is closely tied to developments in Asia. She calls the new American approach 'forward diplomacy'. This entails intensifying US diplomatic relations with China, Japan, South Korea and India. Secretary Clinton didn't mention Europe at all.

Moreover, competition for the world's resources, not only oil and gas but also precious resources like lithium and indium, is becoming fierce. As a result, prices are rising sharply. China has only been importing energy since 1993, but surpassed the US in 2010 and is now the world's main energy consumer.

And then there is the scarcity of food and water. Scarcities have already led to conflict. Extreme weather conditions and the subsequent rise in food prices were among the driving forces of the Arab revolutions. Many Arab families were forced to spend an alarmingly increasing part of their income on food. You remember We don't know how these trends will develop in the future, but it is certain that the clear-cut world we were used to is a thing of the past.

Some of you have witnessed at first hand the threats, attending all these changes. Despite the hardship, Honorary Consuls Waiel Sadawi and Yasmina Azhari have stayed at their posts in Syria. They were there to help Dutch people during the past 15 months of increasing upheaval and sheer violence. We talked yesterday and I commend them.

Geopolitics and economics are closely linked. And this will become even more apparent in the future. The only way to face the global financial crisis and make sure that we don't lose ground in economic growth. And for this, we need free trade, global partners and an open mind.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dutch foreign policy has also experienced thorough change. Effectiveness, Efficiency and a solid sense of reality are the new foundations of our foreign policy. As we say in the Netherlands: jobs, jobs, jobs. Our goals are clear: to promote the safety and prosperity of the Dutch at home and abroad and to safeguard Dutch interests throughout the world. It is no coincidence that the three themes of our current foreign policy are prosperity, freedom and security.

The future of our prosperity is a matter of perspective. In Europe, the economy has been hit hard by the global financial crisis. Director of the IMF, Christine Lagarde, has even spoken of a "lost decade". At the same time, the world economy at large will triple in size over the next thirty years. From 56 trillion dollars today, to 150 trillion dollars in 2040. The major share of global growth will take place in upcoming economies in Asia, Africa and South America. In countries we used to think of as 'developing' like BRICS, MIKT. We also see tremendous growth in Bangladesh. So our goal is clear: we must take part in global growth.

We are a trading nation. As the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics concluded in 2011: export is our way out of the recession. Our GNP is 750 milliard dollar, our export exists of 450 billion of which 350 billion to Europe. This year we export more to Italy, for example, than to China, Brazil, India, Russia and South Africa combined. This is going to change.

Of course, we should cherish the strong trade relations with our direct neighbours. Especially our small and medium size enterprises have a rich tradition in short distance export. But we have to broaden our horizons. That's what it's all about.

Companies, especially medium sized businesses, can use the help of governments to enter faraway markets that play by different rules and traditions than we are used to. Many medium-

size companies in the technology sector, indeed, try to conquer the world with their cutting edge expertise and equipment. But some countries think quite differently about intellectual property rights than we do. Moreover, not all new world powers share our core values of freedom of association. Also freedom of speech and religious freedom. Taking this all together, we have to press for a level playing field– bilaterally as well as in the EU or WTO. We need an international legal order as Hugo de Groot already wrote in his famous *Mare Liberum*.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a clear message I give to you: We need to strengthen our economic diplomacy. We should do so by intensifying cooperation between government and business, and by intensifying business-to-business contacts. In this way, we can protect our interests in Europe and conquer new markets. Good contacts between Dutch trading companies and Dutch missions, finding the right partners and effective trouble-shooting abroad are therefore essential. We need to increase our export and attract more foreign investments.

Because the simple fact is: economic diplomacy pays off. As Minister of Foreign Affairs, I have visited a large number of countries. Me too, just like other cabinet members did during visits abroad, have promoted our trade interests abroad. I have done this in Canada, the United States, Russia, Turkey, Japan, Chile, Brazil and South Korea. And of course in all those European countries, including Poland and Czech Republic. In the aftermath of the Tsunami in Japan and hurricane Katrina in the US, we offered help with our expertise in water management. Last week I was in Jordan, where I talked to my colleague Nasser Judeh and several Jordanian companies. They told me that they are very interested in Dutch expertise on water management, energy and ICT. And also in Israel with a business delegation, it was a productive visit for many mid-size high-tech businesses. These are opportunities for Dutch companies.

Ladies and gentlemen, we still have a world to conquer. And as I told you before, the economy of the world will triple in the years to come, so the future is one of big challenges but also grand opportunities. It's just a bit further away than we were used to. Just as Jacob Lemaire knew.

Luckily, international trade is not a zero sum game. On the contrary, economic growth is a win-win affair. Catch it and you'll pass it on. This is where Honorary Consuls have an important role to play: help us to catch growth! With your immense network of friends and business partners, Dutch companies have global economic access. And with your networks and connections, Dutch companies can be frontrunners on the world stage. With amazing water works. With cutting edge agri-food technology. And with evergreens like our cheese and Rembrandt, whose work is currently exhibited in Istanbul. Our Dutch Design, which was applauded in the Financial Times and Van Gogh, whose work is exhibited in Ottawa. And with our soccer stars.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us now turn the spotlight on Honorary Consul Charles Tchen from Libreville, Gabon.

Mr Tchen has been Honorary Consul since 1989 and he has proved himself to be an exemplary representative of the Netherlands abroad. And he has achieved a great deal for us. Mr Tchen is a living example of how honorary consuls can help with economic diplomacy. Mr Tchen has used his network and contacts so that Dutch parties could gain access to the Gabon market. At this very moment, Dutch companies are in the running to make the river Ogooue more accessible and to dredge part of the Mandji Free Zone. In 2009, Mr Tchen ensured that the negotiations leading to a Status of Forces Agreement between the Netherlands and Gabon ran smoothly. This makes military cooperation between the two countries possible.

But that's not all. In times of crisis, Mr Tchen has gone to the rescue of Dutch people in Gabon. He helped evacuate many people from Brazzaville and Kinshasa during the war. And he helped Maria Lagendijk, a Dutch nun whose dying wish was to be buried next to Doctor Albert Schweitzer. He arranged for Sister Lagendijk's body to be transported from Holland to Lambarene, where she lies today, at Albert Schweitzer's side. And: Mr Tchen helped organize the evacuation of Angeline, a little girl born with a condition called 'water on the brain'. Mr Tchen arranged an air ambulance so that Angeline could be treated in the Netherlands.

So, Charles Tchen is everything we could wish for in an Honorary Consul. He has a natural talent for economic diplomacy, he is loyal to his office and above all: he has an inherent inclination to help people in need. For all these accomplishments, Mr Tchen, it is my pleasure to inform you that it has pleased Her Majesty the Queen to confer on you the title of Knight in the Order of Orange-Nassau.

Ladies and gentlemen,

But you all deserve to be commended for your important work for Dutch people and companies abroad. As Minister of Foreign Affairs I greatly appreciate your commitment. In the past, today and in the future.

Thank you.