Es gilt das gesprochene Wort!

Dear Mayor Aboutaleb, dear Colleague,
sehr geehrter Herr Honorarkonsul Möhring,
ladies and Gentlemen,

on behalf of the citizens of Cologne and me personally it is my great pleasure to welcome you to Cologne.

I am very happy, that you, dear Mayor Aboutaleb, followed my invitation to visit Cologne. We already have had the opportunity to talk personally and we were able to discover a lot of common interests and challenges concerning the social and economic development of our cities.

Dear colleague, ladies and gentlemen, the twin city ship with Rotterdam is very important for Cologne. Therefore I am pleased to learn that Rotterdam feels the same way. In the international report of the City Rotterdam Cologne is mentioned as most important twin cities together with Shanghai and St. Petersburg. That honours us deeply.

Let me draw a balance of our relationship up to now and then have a peak of what the future holds:

Due to the geographic closeness, the excellent traffic connections and tradebonds between our citizens developed very early and for that reason a big variety of mutual relations exist between the twin cities Rotterdam and Cologne.

This positive development was interrupted by the Second World War and the attack of its neighbours by the German Wehrmacht.
But shortly after the end of the war the citizens of Cologne and Rotterdam renewed these relationships. The desire to reconcile and secure an enduring peace and the economic growth led to the foundation of the ring partnership in 1958. Besides Rotterdam and Cologne the cities Esch-sur-Alzette, Lüttich, Turin and Lille are members of the partnership. Since its foundation, the ring partnership has indeed succeeded to bring Europe closer together at the communal level.

Today reconciliation and peacekeeping are not the only topics of our twin city ship, due to the European unification process, we have to face new challenges that we can approach together. As a result we adjusted the collaboration between Rotterdam and Cologne and laid down the new strategic focus in a joint Charta.

I am especially pleased, that our administrations during years already maintain an active exchange regarding the issues of climate change, social politics, urban development, integration and labour market policy. Nearly every year reciprocal visits of representatives or civil servants of our city administrations regarding these topics take place.

Equally important is the personal encounter of the citizens of both cities. This happens mainly at sport events and cultural performances such as readings, exhibitions and concerts.

For example in 2008 the Rotterdam running ambassadors took part in the Köln-Marathon and the same year a group of civil servants of the city administration of Cologne cycled to Rotterdam. At Carnival and in the Christmas season, lots of guests from Rotterdam come to visit Cologne as well.

Based on the new strategic focus of our twin city ship Rotterdam and Cologne created together with the German-Dutch Association the German-Dutch Wirtschaftsforum in 2006. This is a symposium for Dutch and German Entrepreneurs exchanging views about the current challenges in economy and society.
I gladly accept your invitation, dear colleague Aboutaleb, for a visit to the German-Dutch Wirtschaftsforum 2011” in Rotterdam in February. We agreed on the topic “urban development” and I am looking forward to the symposium, because we, here in Cologne, observe the development of your modern metropolis with interest, which in many ways delivers good examples of a successful urban development.

The commitment of the citizens in Cologne is close to my heart. In this regard Cologne has a long tradition. For Example the German-Dutch Association with its versatile programme is a platform for personal encounter of the citizens of the cities Rotterdam and Cologne. At this point, I would like to thank the German-Dutch Association and namely its chairman Mr Möhring.

I am furthermore very delighted, that one of the oldest consular representations of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the one in Cologne, stays preserved. Mr Möhring took the position over, after advocating for the networking between our two cities as an economic ambassador for Cologne for many years.

I am optimistic that we will carry on the already great cooperation between our cities and even intensify it.

We have common challenges ahead of us, which we can approach together in a more efficient way. The main focus will be the integration and the social peace in our cities. Rotterdam and Cologne both feature a high percentage of migrants in the population. We have to make use of their valuable potentials and with the City of Rotterdam we have a worldwide known partner regarding the theme. At this point I like to express my admiration for your personal achievement regarding the topic integration, Mayor Aboutaleb.

Already as a state secretary of the Dutch Government you stood with courage and clear words for mutual respect between the different groups of Citizens in the Netherlands and therefore contributed immensely to the integration process in your country. Now you are certainly confronted with this challenge as Mayor of Rotterdam as well and I am sure, that we can learn a lot from you.
Even the difficult question of how to face the international competition, securing the quality of life and the workplaces of our citizens, is more easily answered by making common efforts between our two cities.

In the future I would very much like to continue the already existing cooperation regarding environmental issues and specifically the fight against climate change. We have a global responsibility, which can only be dealt with at local level. A city which is managed in a sustainable way will be better prepared to face international competition. You already did a lot in this area, and I am very impressed by the ambitious climate plan, that your city administration has set up.

Finally, I would like to suggest that the young generation should be integrated further into our partnership. An example exists already: there is a school exchange between the Berufskolleg in Köln-Deutz and the Zadkine School in Rotterdam. They have performed fruitful cooperation during the last two years. I would very much appreciate it, if more schools from Cologne and Rotterdam would start to cooperate as well.

Dear colleague, today you will have the opportunity, to get an on site impression regarding these topics and to exchange views with members of the city board.

Thank you very much for your excellent cooperation, also to your staff, and thank you for your visit.

I am looking forward to our future collaboration and of course to my visit to Rotterdam next year in February.

Now, dear colleague, I feel honoured to invite you to say a few words.