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**Address by Belgium, Ambassador Bertrand de Crombrughe, Head of the
ASEM 8 Task Force**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Towards the end of this very successful Conference and as representative of the host country of the ASEM 8 Summit, I would like to underline a few points that intend to link the two events. The general theme of the ASEM 8 Summit is, as you know, “achieving greater wellbeing and more dignity for all citizens”, captured in short as “quality of life”.

Quality of life is what the fathers of the concept of Human Development had in mind when they prepared the first United Nations Human Development Report, now 20 years ago. By the way, both authors, Nobel Prize Amartya Sen and the late Mahbub ul Haq were both Asian. Is this a coincidence ? They understood that what people seek is not income per se, but the realization of their potential, the multiplication of their choices, and the opportunity to lead the lives they value. They concluded on the insufficiency of per capita income as the sole measure of a society’s progress. And they proposed that thinking about development would shift to a people-centered approach. The annual Human Development Reports have had and continue to have a considerable impact on researchers and policy makers. It is now generally accepted that GDP is inadequate to gauge important aspects of sustainable development, that we need better systems and policies that capture people’s current wellbeing as well as future sustainability, systems that go beyond one-size-fits-all approaches and take into account the diversity of

people's perception of wellbeing, across civilizations and countries as well as within countries.

This approach - and I think it is much what we heard these two days - should be the fundament of cooperation on economic and social development between Asia and Europe.

On another score, we have moved beyond the North-South stereotype. We have graduated from the giver-receiver-paradigm and we now underscore 'exchange between equals' and 'partnerships built to mutual benefit'. While the general objective of our cooperation should remain sustainable development and poverty eradication, such cooperation is now about "**ideas changing minds**" rather than "money changing hands". And such cooperation is to be carried out by a more diverse range of "entities" : educational, scientific, cultural institutions, civil society organizations, chambers of commerce, private companies and the like. In such a model, governments, both Asian and European, will have to be "facilitators" and "organizers", in addition to providing finances.

The "**ASEM Aquaculture Platform**" is an excellent example of what I have in mind. Started as a cooperation agreement between a European (Belgian) university and Asian academic research centers, it gave birth to commercial ventures complemented by cooperation schemes involving European and Asian universities, research centers and public-private partnerships. Aquaculture has evolved from artisan fish-farming to a technology-based agro-industry. The current aquaculture technology originates from European led developments. The production is today predominantly in Asia. Aquaculture was identified as an area of common interest at the ASEM Conference on Science and Technology in Beijing in October 1999. A few Asian and European key people set up the Platform in 2003. They built a coalition between Asian and European actors in production and consumption, and now, a step further, carry the dialogue on research strategies serving sustainable, safe and healthy aquaculture production. The membership of the platform includes today over 60 entities from the academic and scientific world, governments and private sector operatives from

25 Asian and European countries. It stands as an outstanding example of a concrete, innovating, sector-specific initiative, developing an activity clearly reflecting a common interest.

As a last point I would like to focus on the importance of **inclusive growth**. In the run-up to the September United Nations General Assembly high-level review meeting on the Millennium Development Goals, more reliable data on poverty and on the social exclusion that goes with it, have been made available. We learn that economic growth has spectacularly improved the living conditions of hundreds of millions of people, particularly in Asia. But we also learn that inequality has risen worldwide, including in Europe.

Poverty is about much more than lack of income. It is about social exclusion and lack of life chances. It is strongly linked to access to education and health services. It is about preparedness for labor-markets that become ever more fluid and require increasing adaptability. It is, indeed, about dignity for all citizens, as the general theme of the ASEM 8 Summit indicates. It is, ultimately - and not to forget-, about relieving social and political tensions that may get out of hand.

Human development, ideas changing minds, mutual exchange of knowledge and expertise, and inclusive growth, these are the elements, I feel, have emerged from our discussions. I think therefore, that they will be central when next October in Brussels, our Leaders debate about advancing on the path of sustainable development.

Thank you very much.