

Visit of H.E. Mr. Abbas to the States General on 30 June 2011

**Opening Address by Mr. Fred de Graaf,
President of the Senate of the Netherlands**

Plenary Hall of the Senate, 11:30 AM

Excellency,

On behalf of the States General I welcome you here in this House as President of the Senate. We are here today with Members of both Houses of Parliament to meet with your Excellency. We are looking forward to hearing from you what you want to convey to us, and next we will have a discussion. This discussion will be led by the Right Honourable Member Mr. Pechtold, who is the Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives. After that, my esteemed colleague, Mrs. Gerdi Verbeet, the President of the House of Representatives, will address you with some final remarks while closing this function.

But first, Excellency, to give you a sense of orientation, if I may, I should like to point out that you are positioned here right in the middle between 'War' and 'Peace'. If you look on your left you will see, above the balcony, the painting of the God Mars, depicted by the painter Lievens. And on your right you will see a painting by Hannemann that is supposed to visualize Peace. The two paintings could be seen as

representing the two main traditions in international relations: the one stands for Realism and Hobbes' war of all against all; the other for Idealism and Kant's perpetual peace. The Dutch have never adhered to one or the other, but instead they have taken the middle ground. It was Grotius who introduced a third tradition, based on public international law. As you know, Grotius' deepest conviction was that the behaviour of states could be brought under the rule of law, both in war and peace. Today, The Hague is still the city of Grotius, and some even call it the Judicial Capital of the World.

Next to this, there is also this other dimension that is so familiar to the Dutch. It has to do with trade. As a matter of fact, if you look up, reference to this has been made by paintings around the ceiling. There, you can see persons from all nations we traded with in the seventeenth century. They are listening carefully to what was decided in this room. While those times have passed, it is still true that we invest in trade relations. As a matter of fact, in the relations with the Palestinian people, as you know, the Dutch government has supported the Gazan flower, strawberry and vegetable farmers since 2006. The financial support helped to safeguard the cash crops sector, which represents an important pillar for the Gaza Strip's economic future. It is hoped that this support may lead to a broadening of opportunities for Gazan businesses to export their products, so they can restore their links to the international market.

With this brief introduction, Excellency, on not just the political, but also the economic dimension, I would say the whole spectrum lies open for discussion. We are very glad that we can have this discussion, and that you have accepted the invitation of our Foreign Secretary during his visit to you in February, to come to The Netherlands. At that occasion he made clear that a two-State solution is at the core of the approach of the Dutch government: a democratic Jewish state and a democratic Palestinian state who recognize each other as states, and respect the rights of minorities within their states.

We are very glad that we have the opportunity to expand on this right here, in Parliament. International relations are no longer the *exclusive* preserve of governments. Members of Parliament are undertaking more and more diplomatic activities, which thus *supplement* the efforts of the government within the context of 'traditional' diplomacy. Members of *our* Parliament seek to deploy their parliamentary contacts to promote the international democratic legal order and in particular serve national interests, based on the notion that parliamentarians are ideally placed to build bridges between conflicting parties. It is in this context that we seek to contribute, most notably, to initiating activities aimed at peace, security and strengthening democracy and human rights (including the rights of minorities within each and every state).

Although the world is no longer watching through the painted windows in our ceiling, I am confident that we can contribute to those goals when exchanging our views. First, however, we are keen to listen to your speech. Excellency, without further ado I give you the floor.