

Speech rector 2nd CELAC-EU ACADEMIC SUMMIT - 8 June 2015

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a real honor for me, as rector of the Brussels university VUB, to address a few words here today.

In Dutch Vrije Universiteit Brussel, in Spanish **Universidad Libre de Bruselas**, VUB incorporates the principle of Free Inquiry in its daily operation.

For VUB, humanism is not just a theoretical thought, but a life practice.

As comprehensive university in the cosmopolitan city of Brussels, we want to be perceived as an open independent university platform, embedded in international networks.

Our attitude is one of mediation and critical discussion.

This goes hand in hand with high quality research, without prejudice, dogma or religious bias.

We have students from around the world -that otherwise would never come in direct contact with one another.

They feel at home on our green campuses in a world city and they participate in a tight community.

"Unity in diversity" means more to us than just the integration of foreigners in the local ecosystem.

We wish to be the source of new creative talent with a clear intercultural focus.

A focus that goes beyond the obvious and that is open to new ideas and perspectives.

Consequently, VUB's international strategy is multilayered.

The pillars for effective internationalization are education and research – that's obvious - but also community engagement and outreach activities.

Also, we are convinced that the competences, experience and knowledge within one single university are insufficient to understand the complexity of today's problems, to model them and to design solutions.

VUB is strongly engaged in the creation of societal value and impact originating from groundbreaking research.

For this reason, development cooperation programs and projects take a prominent place in our strategy.

In our actions in developing countries, we strive for long-term continuity. We want the collaboration to be sustainable, even when external financial aid stops.

We continue to organize specialized master programs, with particular relevance to developing countries.

And we make efforts to expand the network of host institutions for our students in developing countries and emerging markets.

In this context, we consider that strong partnerships and networks are the key tools to implement our international vision, and this is where Latin America and the Caribbean comes into play.

In addition to long-standing structural partnerships, we are working hard to expand our scope of action in the region by working at several levels. We are developing joint labs, group mobility schemes and new scholarship programs.

We are joining strategic networks as well.

Consistent with our growing interest in the region, and in the framework of the CELAC – EU Academic Summit, we are delighted to host several thematic workshops tomorrow, at our Etterbeek campus in Brussels.

We consider this to be an ideal way to foster interaction across the regions. There is no better way to show you how attractive our university is.

And there is no better way to motivate our academic community to expand its interaction with academics and policy makers in Latin America and The Caribbean.

Bienvenidos a Bruselas, y los esperamos mañana en la VUB!

I thank you.