

Belgium is the Future: US-Belgium Relations

His Excellency Mr. Howard W. Gutman, the Ambassador of the United States of America to Belgium gave a lecture on the US-Belgium relations at KUL University Hall on November 13th, 2009. His first official visit to Leuven, Gutman addressed the student body on issues of climate change, the concerns for Afghanistan and Belgium's role in creating a better future. He suggested that cooperation between Belgium and the US will enable us to lead Europe and the world into a brighter future.

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90% of the world's pollution is created by developed nations. As a political issue, Gutman believed that the problem of climate change has become a political game where one nation attempts to outperform the other. More effort is being placed on creating a positive impression that a country is fighting against climate change, rather than on actually constructing concrete policies to combat the issue. Nations are impeding each other's progress instead of helping each other through mutual cooperation. From this point of view, Gutman suggested that one must look at the progress that our countries have made together, appreciate that progress and look to the future. The issue of climate change can only be solved if we focus on effort, result and commitment.

A specialist on terrorism and an advisor to Barack Obama, Gutman stressed the importance of mutual respect and cooperation between the United States and Belgium. This cooperation is especially crucial in rebuilding Afghanistan. Gutman believed that issues facing Afghanistan cannot be solved by American strategies alone, but through "partnership with world citizens." Together, Belgium and the United States can help Afghanistan to create a better environment and encourage development for the women of that country.

Through cooperation, the reconstruction of the country's infrastructure, health and education system can also be achieved. Gutman proposed that Belgium need to trust the United States and help rebuild the future of Afghanistan together, be-

cause the issue of terror affects us all.

A crucial point made during the lecture concerns Belgium's role for future cooperation. Gutman was convinced that Belgium is "at the head of the pack," and is "in the lead" for positive international relations. As home to NATO and EU institutions, Belgium is the "eyes and ears of Europe and much of the world." Gutman cited Belgium's help in closing Guantanamo Bay detention camp in Cuba, and was hopeful that Belgium will continue its positive relationship with the United States. Gutman concluded that Belgium has the "necessary leadership" to be in the front, making it an important player in the international political field.

After the lecture, questions were raised concerning the issue of terrorism, developments in Africa, especially in Congo, and the current economic crisis. During these discussions, Gutman reinforced his idea of world cooperation in combating these issues. He believed that both the United States and Belgium are being vigilant about these topics and the best way to finding solution is through dialogue. To engage in meaningful conversation with each other, everyone must become a "better listener, a better learner and a better partner" It was during the questions though, that



it became clear that the ambassador was being very loyal to his government, which allowed little space for personal opinions. In this way, he reminded of the Chinese ambassador who visited Leuven only a couple of weeks earlier. After a very critical question about the ambiguity in America's nuclear policy, in which they strongly oppose the Iranian program but have no intention whatsoever of including India and Pakistan in any non-proliferation treaties, the ambassador simply swerved the issue by stating that there was too little time to tackle this hard subject. Overall, His Excellency concluded that the United States and Belgium "must together, build that better future." During his term as Ambassador, Gutman aims to travel to every city in Belgium, promoting and taking steps toward the much needed mutual understanding and cooperation between Belgium and the United States. |