

PRIME MINISTER OF THE KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS
HIS EXCELLENCY DR. JAN PETER BALKENENDE IMPRESSED BY HIS
MAJESTY SULTAN QABOOS BIN SAID AL SAID OF OMAN: LECTURE ON
THE OCCASION OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE SULTAN QABOOS BIN
SAID AL SAID ACADEMIC CHAIR FOR WATER MANAGEMENT IN
RELATION TO ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

14 December 2005, Town Hall of Wassenaar/The Hague, The Netherlands

During a solemn session in the stately Town Hall of the City of Wassenaar near The Hague in The Netherlands, Prime Minister Dr. Jan Peter Balkenende addressed an audience of the Netherlands-Oman Foundation on the occasion of the celebration of 35 years of unprecedented leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said of Oman. Among the participants were 18 Ambassadors representing the Member States of the European Union, the Gulf Cooperation Council, Asia and Latin America. The meeting was co-hosted by the Lord Mayor of Wassenaar, Dr. Luigi van Leeuwen, and Foundation Chairman Former Prime Minister Andries van Agt. Senior representatives of Ministries, political and societal organizations, academia, industries and the media expressed their deep appreciation and their surprise over the presence of the Prime Minister; Dr. Balkenende appeared to have left top-level consultations prior to the European Union Summit later this week, which is currently experiencing heavy weather. The audience noticed that the Prime Minister spoke without a prepared text. His views and insights on Oman and on the way the Omani people have been guided to the balanced and developed society of today came from his personal experience and from his heart. In particular, the Prime Minister referred to his private conversation with His Majesty the Sultan that was planned to take 20 minutes but that lasted one and a half hour. While he did not want to discuss the content of this conversation, he emphasized the importance of a dialogue between different cultures and religions. The exchange of information, knowledge and cooperation to mutual benefit is a priority for today's world. Therefore, the Prime Minister said he was both happy and proud that the Roosevelt Academy in Middelburg, Zeeland, was the first to host such an important Academic Chair, both in terms of orientation and content. The fact that the Prime Minister comes from Zeeland added a special dimension in his statement. Prime Minister Balkenende referred to a letter that he was honoured to present to His Majesty the Sultan of Her Majesty the Queen. In this letter His Majesty is invited for a State Visit to The Netherlands. He expressed the hope that The Netherlands would have the honour to host His Majesty for this historic visit.

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At the start of his remarks, Prime Minister Balkenende referred to Oman as a unique country that is characterized by 35 years of social development in peace under the inspiring leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said. He said his private meeting with His Majesty the Sultan impressed him deeply. He highlighted the intercultural element of his visit to Muscat, in particular his visit to the Sultan Qaboos Mosque that also serves as a lecture centre. Such centres can play an important role in the intercultural dialogue.

The Prime Minister said he was impressed by the level of development that has been reached in Oman. Traveling through Oman and reading the Omani newspapers he had become a witness of the enormous strides that have made in the past 35 years, leading to a very high standard of living. He emphasized the rapidly deepening and broadening relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. He said he needed these relations to be effective and focused at sharing knowledge to mutual benefit.

Therefore, he felt that the Sultan Qaboos Academic Chair for Water Management in Relation to Economic Diversification was of substantial importance. Water management in The Netherlands is historically of crucial relevance and what could better serve a mutually beneficial relationship than to share knowledge in this field between both countries. This was not only relevant for the bilateral relationship, but indeed to the world at large.

Nevertheless, it was not only the important content of the Academic Chair that drew the appreciation of the Prime Minister. “The strategy for the 21st century must be that people meet, that they talk about important issues. It is not only the subject matter of water that makes this Chair unique. It is the international cooperation that this initiative embodies which makes it so attractive.”

Professor Dr. Hans Adriaansens, Dean of the Roosevelt Academy of Universiteit Utrecht, is expected to travel to Muscat in January 2006. In his statement, he announced that the Roosevelt Academy seeks to have an exchange programme with Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat. Prof. Adriaansens will discuss with the appropriate Omani authorities the selection of the ten best first year students for a stipendium at the Roosevelt Academy. These stipendia are donated by the oldest and largest industry in Zeeland, Royal Schelde. Prof. Adriaansens is also expected to meet Her Excellency Dr. Rawya bint Saud bin Ahmed al Busaidiyah, Minister of Higher Education, and His Excellency Sayyed Badr bin Hamad bin Hamoud Al Bu Said, Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the Middle East Desalination Research Centre.

The bilateral relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of the Netherlands includes a unique combination of elements, including trade, transport, logistics, technology, infrastructure, security and diplomacy. In the past ten years an equally unique bilateral political consultation process between countries from the GCC and the European Union has created an unprecedented level of understanding and cooperation. The recent visit of Prime Minister Balkenende to Muscat (14-16 November 2005) and the invitation by Her Majesty Queen Beatrix to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos are historic highlights in this relationship. Against this background, Prime Minister Balkenende said he hoped that His Majesty the Sultan would give the Netherlands the honour to host the Omani Sovereign in The Netherlands next year.

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