SCK-CEN

June 28, 2012

60th Anniversary of SCK-CEN
Ambassador Howard Gutman
Mol, Belgium

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for that introduction.
Your Royal Highness, Prince Philippe Crown Prince of (the Kingdom of) Belgium;
Ministers;
State Secretaries;
Governor;
Mayors;
Distinguished officials;
My fellow Ambassadors (Michele and Jun);
Dedicated scientists, engineers and the highly skilled workers of the Belgian Nuclear Research Center;

Ladies and gentlemen;
Friends all:
It is a pleasure to be here with you as we celebrate your 60 years. That is 60 years of science, 60 years of advancement, 60 years of innovation.
And I am proud to say that the U.S. has been with you the entire time. So as you celebrate your 60 years, we can also celebrate 60 years of our partnership.
The U.S.-Belgian relationship is built on many pillars: mutual respect and genuine admiration, security cooperation, business links, family ties, and academic connections. In all areas, through all the years of our partnership, the U.S. and Belgium have been building a better world together.
I have often spoken about the theory of building that better world. And often I must speak in abstracts. It is indeed too easy for a diplomat to speak about ideals in search of a better world.
But, for the past 60 years, you have not worried about abstract concepts or the theory of building a better world. You have your intelligence and your diligence to advance science, to save lives, and to actually build the bridge of our partnership. So today, today at SCK-CEN, we speak about concrete progress, concrete contributions.
I often speak to future leaders -- in Leuven and Louvain La Neuve. In Liege and Namur. In Ghent and Antwerp. In Brussels and in Molenbeek.
I tell them that their generation will have to complete the projects of my generation. I tell them that, indeed, their generation will have to fix the mistakes of my generation. I tell them that they will be building a better, cleaner, more secure world for tomorrow.
Today, at SCK-CEN, you are building that better, cleaner, more secure world. This is where a better tomorrow is emerging. And I am proud to say that the U.S. and Belgium continue to work together to get to that better tomorrow.
One of the things that I hear most often as I have traveled around this marvelous country for nearly three years is Belgian modesty. Some say Belgium is but a small country. It has a small population and a small budget. What difference, they ask, can Belgium make? Does Belgium make? Has Belgium made?
Those people undervalue Belgium. Those people sell Belgium short. I never undervalue Belgium. I will never sell Belgium short. The United States will never sell Belgium short.

You see, of course Belgium has a limited budget and limited manpower. But, though Belgium may be small, Belgium is large in credibility. Belgium is large in action. Belgium is large in results. Belgium does not speak that often or that loudly. Belgium does not speak with a hidden agenda. So when Belgium speaks, people listen. Belgium indeed leads in credibility.

Here at SCK-CEN, you know this every day. Here, at SCK-CEN we know this every day. We know that Belgium is not large, but it is critical. We know that the advances in science that this facility has seen have helped people all over the world. We know that the international cooperation that involves your experts has led to important developments in science, medicine and international security.

In my work, I see daily how critical Belgium's contribution to the world is. Whether in preserving human rights in Afghanistan; preserving our joint security by efforts in Afghanistan. I saw it during Trade Missions when I visited Harvard and MIT with your Royal Highness and a Belgian delegation to witness the signing of agreements with Belgian universities to do research that will find a cure for Alzheimer's. I see it when I visit bio-medical laboratories that are leading the way in gene therapies to cure cancer.

And I experienced it first-hand when the world was critically short of a medical isotope. In 2010, I learned that the production of Molybdenum-99 / Moly-99 had been disrupted because two production facilities went offline. Belgium was one of the only countries and SCK-CEN was one of the only facilities that could step into the breach. We came to you then and requested your help. We knew that without Belgium, we would lose our ability to catch an early tumor and prevent someone from dying from untreated cancer. Without Belgium, we would lose our ability to run a brain scan to catch early signs of dementia. Without Belgium, we would lose our ability to identify the person whose heart needed to be rescued with an intervention. This was very personal to me, because I had that heart screening before I arrived here and was able to catch an unknown threat early and deal with it. SCK-CEN came through then. SCK-CEN continues to come through. You are providing the entire world critical supplies of this isotope so that medical advances can continue. Can there be any doubt about Belgium's influence? Can anyone still demur that Belgium is but a small country?

It is in critical moments like these and in those international scientific and security advances that you experience every day here in Mol that we understand who the true Ambassadors are. You are. Your connections build the bridge that constitutes the long and successful U.S.-Belgian partnership. And while my predecessors have come and gone, while I too will someday face the end of the diplomatic clock, the U.S.-Belgian partnership at SCK-CEN has long flourished.

Long before the official "birth" of Belgium's Nuclear Energy Research Center (SCK-CEN) 60 years ago, cooperation between Belgium and the United States in nuclear energy had begun.

- On September 26, 1944, Belgium signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United States and the United Kingdom and Belgium to supply uranium ore to the allies from the Congo in exchange for access to nuclear expertise for commercial and non-military applications. The groundwork was laid for Belgium's independent development of nuclear energy research.

- Since the mid-fifties, SCK-CEN has carried out research on the reprocessing of irradiated nuclear fuel. Oak Ridge laboratories in the United States provided the weakly irradiated metallic uranium for this research.

- Belgium's first nuclear reactor, the BR1 began to operate on May 11, 1956. The BR1, an air-cooled reactor based on a U.S. design, is still operating today.

- U.S. and Belgium cooperation was strengthened when Belgium decided to build a materials

testing reactor (MTR) with the help of the Nuclear Development Corporation, an American engineering consultancy in White Plains, New York. SCK-CEN staff, engineers from industry, research agencies and power generation companies took part, and construction began in September 1957.

- Belgium's growing role in nuclear research was recognized at the 1958 World Exhibition in Brussels, as the Belgian Association for the Peaceful Development of Atomic Energy organized an exhibition held in the Atomium. Since then, SCK-CEN and Belgonucleaire have made huge progress often in combination with U.S. expertise and used plutonium sourced from the United States.
- On July 6, 1961, the U.S. Ambassador to Belgium Douglas MacArthur II and Belgian Prime Minister Theo Lefevre were among the dignitaries present when Belgium Reactor 2 (BR2) produced its first nuclear chain reaction. Belgium flipped the switch on BR2 in January 1963, and is still the most powerful research reactor in Western Europe.

- Belgium decided to build a nuclear power plant about 8 years before BR3 went into service in 1964. Westinghouse in the United States was chosen to construct a Pressurized Water Reactor (PWR) because of the company's experience with such reactors, the first one in Europe.

But the long partnership in scientific advances makes up only one half of the story. The technology here that brings so much good to so much of the world also carries the potential for much danger. And in nuclear security, as in scientific advances, could there be any partner better than Belgium? In non-proliferation as well, Belgium leads.

Throughout each day, I receive on my Blackberry press releases and other announcements from the White House. The truth is that these rarely involve Belgium. During last the nuclear security summit in Seoul last spring, however, the very first communiqué issued by the White House was one about the U.S.-Belgian agreement on nuclear security. In this area, too, Belgium is a leader working together with us.

Belgium and the United States have long worked well together. Our cooperation over these sixty years has paid such rich dividends for both of us and the world. The Belgian Nuclear Research Center has long been, and remains today, a leader in the development of nuclear technology.

Belgium and the United States continue to work well together. Indeed, let me extend a word of thanks to the current government for their responsiveness on our recent discussions aimed at making our two countries and the world safer.

Our partnership continues to thrive. Indeed, though it so far was largely missed by the Belgian press, the recent news is that in the past year, Belgium finished first out of every country in the world on the Gallup Poll that measures each country's favorability rating for U.S. leadership. Belgium had the largest percentage gain in the world with a 15% increase in the percentage of people who view U.S. leadership favorably, so that Belgians now view the U.S. favorably by more than 2 to 1.

There is nothing "small" about Belgium. There is nothing small about Belgium here in Mol. Belgium is indeed a world leader here. Belgium is a leader in doing good, in stepping up, in helping us deal with potential consequences of good work.

Thanks so much and all the best.