

Mr Jun Sup Shin,

President JCI Belgium

President JCI flanders,

President JCI Brussel

Dear senators and members of JCI,

I'm very happy to welcome such an international gathering of important JCI members in the city hall of Brussels Capital. When Kris Sierens asked me to say a few words to you I felt very honored. I was also very pleased to hear that you all work to promote Active Citizenship all over the world. As a member of this city council and member of the regional parliament I can't stress enough the importance of active citizenship. Without representation people would be victim of the dictates of decisionmakers. And members of parliaments and city counselors need to have a close relationship with the people they represent. This relation is a relation coming from both sides. Politicians have to be present and approachable on the one hand. They need to come forward to meet citizens. On the other hand citizens need to express their opinions and complaints to their representatives. Not only to the ones that take the decisions, like secretaries of state or ministers, but also to the ones that represent them, the members of parliament and city counselors. Sometimes people forget that the member of parliament that he or she voted for is his or her spokesperson in parliament. And sometimes members of parliament forget to be the real spokesperson of the people they represent.

Active citizenship sometimes ends in politics and Brussels is the political heart of many international organizations. Brussels is not only the region with the highest amount of journalists in the world, even more than Washington, it's the region which houses NATO, the European union, uncountable lobby organizations, the national and regional parliaments. More than 30% of the inhabitants of Brussels are foreigners and give our city an international label. Some say that Brussels is the word in small.

As you see this place is not only a house of local democracy, but it's also a building with a rich history beginning in ... Many kings and queens made this place their property. France, Austriche, Spain, The Netherlands ... they all ruled here and made Brussels either the centre either an important center of their power. Since 1830 this place is a Belgian house lodging the city council of Brussels capital.

Despite the worldwide economical crises Brussels has many recent and future projects that makes it a very interesting place for international meetings. Two weeks ago a beautiful congressbuilding, Square, was inaugurated just a few steps away from the central station. In Bruparck, at the Heysel, the Brussels Regions plans another congresscenter with 4000 seats. Of course you all know Brussels to be the city of the atomium and manneken pis, restaurants, French fries, beer and chocolat. But, Brussels has become important in the world of fashion. Many of you may know Oliver Strelli, I'm sure. I know that it is not a very clean city but were working on it.

I can imagine that many of you thought manneken pis would be bigger, but actually Belgians are the opposite of Americans, they have an eye for small things and surrealism. Mind the painters Magritte

and Delvaux. Our shy and modest nature makes us vulnerable the jokes of the French and the Dutch about us. Do you know why a Belgian takes off his glasses during an alcoholtest? Well, two glasses less.

I hope you have a really nice stay here and hope to meet you again when JCI Brussels organize their world congress. Thank you

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