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“The Ruhr Lab”

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Dear Guests,

After having enjoyed artistic street arts by URBANATIX, I am delighted to direct some warm words to you. Welcome to the European Capital of Culture 2010. The congress ‘Our Common Future’ marks the highlight of the RUHR.2010 European Capital of Culture academic programme. Thanks to you all for the enlightening sparks you brought to Hannover and Essen.

Speaking about “Culture” tonight, we also have to think about “ideas”. “Inspiring ideas” is our guiding principle at Stiftung Mercator.

This has a dual meaning: We are convinced that the principle “inspiring ideas” can make the world a better place, and that we can and should help to inspire such ideas.

We are certain that this region – the Ruhr region – is an ideal laboratory suitable to test our ideas – improving education, integration and policy tackling climate change. Here, we find the right places, occasions, social circumstances, partners and potentials. The Ruhr area is a region with a long tradition of change and transformation and a melting pot of cultures and people from different origins and we are proud of the fact that we are united in diversity.

Yes, we are still proud of our industrial history and heritage. But we are even more proud of the development in science, research and higher education. Less than 50 years ago the number of universities and students was “Zero” and today?

There are 163,472 students in higher education institutions with 19,844 international students. The ‘big three’ - the Ruhr-University Bochum, University of Duisburg-Essen and TU Dortmund – have 80,000 Students in total.

Today, the Ruhr area is home to small and large research institutions . There are 6 universities, 6 art colleges, 15 universities of applied sciences, and 39 non-university research institutions.

The people living in the Ruhr Area appreciate that scientists, academics and researchers play a decisive role in shaping the future of the Ruhr area. This is not merely known by politicians and academics, but also accepted by blue-collar workers.

Especially, during this year - the Ruhr area being the European Capital of culture – the area has changed its mentality in a peculiar manner.

The Swiss writer Adolf Muschg once called the Ruhr area “a workshop of forward-looking ideas.” We at Stiftung Mercator want to be actively involved in this workshop with the organization of conferences like “Our common future”. The idea of a “Global Young Faculty” provides an example for direction we want to go here in the Ruhr area.

When I dream about our common future in this region, I dream of an area, home to young scientists, meeting frequently to exchange ideas on their vision of a bright future and on the responsibility of science. This corresponds to our guiding principle of Stiftung Mercator - “inspiring ideas!”

Let me conclude with a recommendation:

After all sessions and discussion in this conference, you should discover the Ruhr area for yourself. You should get to know important features of the essential Ruhr culture – its lively passion - letting you feel the hospitality of the whole region. There is a fascinating natural countryside with newly accessible scenes of the industrial past. Distinctive regional features of old have been joined by cultural offerings of international format.

In the end, your conclusions from the conference, your chat with other participants should remind you of the open minds spirit here at the Ruhr

Thank you and see you in the future!