

June 8, 2015, The Hague

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and an honor to introduce to you a man of such great accomplishments as Senator George Mitchell. As a 16-year-old boy with a poor background he was advised by his school principle **not** to go to the nationally respected college that he had set his eyes on; Bowdoin College in New Brunswick, in the state of Maine. The principle advised him to forget about it: he wouldn't fit in, the boys there are from different backgrounds, he told him.

Well, young George Mitchell fortunately wasn't so easily discouraged. And after a difficult weekend - and I quote – “gradually the anger dissipated, the self-pity lifted, the tears dried up, and I began to see I had a chance to change my life. I would show them!”

And show them he did, ladies and gentlemen. “One of the luckiest days in my life was the day I first walked into the campus of Bowdoin College”, he writes in his fascinating new book, *The Negotiator, a Memoir*. College turned out to be the beginning of a career that brought him not only to the very center of power in Washington DC, as a senator and majority leader, but also to the world stage, where as a special advisor to President Clinton for Northern Ireland, he played a key role in the talks that led to the truly historic Good Friday Agreement that ended decades of violent conflict.

Often you look at these kind of bloody conflicts between religious communities that go on and on and on, and you ask yourself: will this ever stop, or is it **impossible** to get rid of this kind of deep seated hatred? But in Northern Ireland it was done and one of the reasons is that senator Mitchell believed it **could** be done.

You get a better introduction than my own, if you read *The Negotiator*. I only wish all political memoirs were like that. It is not only about an interesting life and historic events, it is also deeply personal. It contains life lessons as George Mitchell learned them. It's not just about successes, but also about doubts and failures. In one word, it is a very human book, and that makes it a joy to read.

Before and after his political career senator Mitchell was also a lawyer – he served as Chairman of the global board of the international law firm DLA Piper, one of the sponsors of this event. But that's not all. He was also Chairman of Disney, president Obama's special envoy for Middle East Peace, and he led a high profile investigation on the use of performance enhancing drugs in Major League Baseball.

So from politics to Disney, to baseball to the Middle East and of course the great state of Maine—let's see if we can cover all the bases.

Juurd Eijsvoogel