

**Speech at the ISN-R Cultural Festival 2009, 7th of June 2009, Rapenburg 70
by prof.dr. Rietje van Dam, vice-rector**

Dear visitors,

It's my pleasure to be present today and to welcome you on behalf of Leiden University to the third edition of the Cultural Festival.

We are really happy that International Student Network Representation (ISN-R) took the initiative to organize the Cultural Festival again this year.

The Festival is a unique opportunity for our International and also our Dutch students to show their culture and to show what they are proud of concerning their country. It also celebrates the harmonious living together of different cultures and diverse societies, without being limited by borders or stereotypes.

Currently there are over 1500 international students pursuing their studies here at Leiden University. It has been a goal of the University to become truly international, and to see the number of international students grow.

Hence, it is a pleasure for us to see all these international and also Dutch students working together. Through the efforts of students like you, we can achieve a much richer and brighter future for our University, our city, and our country, since working together is highly beneficial for mutual understanding and respect, values that become more and more important in our increasingly multicultural society. Bringing people from different backgrounds together is never an easy task. Events like the 'Week of Diversity' (just one week ago) and this Cultural Festival are therefore very important and have potentially a significant positive effect on the successful integration and exchange between people and societies.

As Leiden University, the oldest university in the Netherlands, we are proud that a small group of our own students has taken the initiative and has organized such a beautiful event with a lot of enthusiasm. I would like to thank ISN-R for all their efforts and hard work.

Before I give back the word to the Cultural Festival Committee, I would like to announce the winners of the writing contest of the 'Week of Diversity'. Students and staff members had the opportunity to write a poem or short story around the theme 'Encounters'. 16 persons of diverse backgrounds joined the writing contest and produced a great diversity in writings.

I would like to introduce the jury members: Joris van Bergen (VanBergenFoundation), Ingrid Tieken (professor English Language and Culture), Arjen van Veelen (editor Mare), Grace Chin (president of ISN-r) and myself as president of the jury.

In judging we looked at some criteria: the writing had to be original, catchy, surprising and to appeal to the jury members. We enjoyed reading all the poems and short stories!

Because of the diversity the jury had a hard time to come up with a winner. Therefore we decided that there should be not 1 but 3 winners. Each winner receives 100 Euro in book coupons.

But before I announce these winners, there is a honorable mention.

The jury found one poem very special because we looked at the content in different ways. I thought it was about backpackers, another jury member thought it was about homeless people, and one explained it had to do with chemistry and molecules. It was very fascinating to discuss this poem. Therefore: the honorable mention goes to Billy Cocquyt, student Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology. During the jury meeting the 3 winners received in two ballots an equal amount of points. They were all writing in a catchy, appealing way. One of the winners, a short story, was very surprising and had a suspension of disbelief which continued in a convincing way till the very end. A beautiful end we can say.

The second winner, also a short story, was chosen because it was abstract and had 'understanding without rhetoric'. It was beautifully written.

The third winner, a poem, had a unconstrained, light-footed and original structure. You could really see the encounter happen before your eyes.

The winners are:

-Myrthe Brouwer (student English language and culture) with the short story 'A close encounter with the Elephantidae kind'

- Jeroen Schrama (staff member of the University Library) with the short story 'Een vreemde ontmoeting' (A strange encounter)
- Petra Meijer (student Sinology) with the poem 'Kantinelunch'

You can read their entries and all the other entries at the reading table in the hallway of this building.

I hope you have a fantastic afternoon and I hope you will now enjoy the many diverse performances from different countries here on this stage. Therefore, I would like to give the word again to the Cultural Festival Committee 2009.

Thank you