



AIDS 2014 Opening Statement
EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE 19.00 AEST - SUNDAY 20 JULY 2014

Statement on behalf of Ms Lilianne Ploumen, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, The Netherlands.

Delivered by Lambert Grijns, Ambassador for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights & HIV/AIDS.

It is with a heavy heart that I take the floor here today. As we all know, delegations to this conference have been hard-hit by the tragedy on July 17th, when flight MH17 of Malaysian Airlines crashed in Ukraine. Many people across the globe are mourning the loss of their loved ones. Among the victims, as you know, were many fellow Dutch citizens, 193. You can imagine the sadness in my home country. But I would like to take this opportunity to first express my heartfelt condolences to the families, relatives and friends of the victims from our host nation, Australia, and those from other countries represented here.

Six of the victims were heading for Melbourne and they leave a huge void in this conference. Among them was Glenn Thomas, the WHO media officer and five Dutch citizens.

Allow me to take a few moments to remember the Dutch colleagues and friends who are no longer with us. In this long fight against a disease that has taken so many lives, we have become a global but tight-knit community. And it is within this community that we share our hopes and fears, triumphs and disappointments. The people we have lost last Thursday contributed to many triumphs and thus fuelled hope – the most precious thing we have. For that we can't thank them enough.

One of the triumphs was the emergence, after years of hard work, of antiretroviral therapy. Dr Joep Lange, involved in the struggle from the very beginning, was instrumental in this research and later on in the design of the prevention of mother-to-child transmission therapy. With his vision, combined with enthusiasm, commitment and perseverance, he was a true pioneer. As a tireless advocate for the dignity of all HIV-infected persons throughout the world, he inspired many. A giant, as president-elect of the IAS, Chris Beyers, rightly described him.

During his own years as president of the International Aids Society, Joep worked ever more closely with Jacqueline van Tongeren, who eventually became his partner. She was a health professional with long-standing experience in the care of people with HIV and in research coordination. This modest, driven and loyal woman, was as dedicated to the cause as Joep was.

Martine de Schutter had a clear goal in life: make the world a better place to live, work and love in. As a staunch defender of human rights and of the right to good health in particular, she worked for many years on advocacy for better HIV policies and programs at AIDS Action Europe. Just recently, she took up the position of program manager of Bridging the Gaps, at AIDS FONDS, fighting for the rights and health of key populations. Only last month, she proudly presented the achievements of that program to us and outlined the many opportunities she saw.

Lucie van Mens was an outstanding professional. She worked for the cause of sex workers for years, when hardly anyone else was doing so. We had the honor of working with her when she was heading the Universal Access to Female Condoms (UAFC) Joint Programme. She was a driving force in the advocacy for the female condom, a product that she firmly believed in as a tool that enables women to make their own decisions about sexuality and reproduction. She gave the product its rightful place in the field of SRHR, HIV/Aids and women's rights. For the last couple of years she contributed to the uptake of female condoms in a whole range of countries, where her impact will no doubt continue to be felt.

Pim de Kuijer was much-loved by everyone he met. He combined a cheerful and open character with a strong sense of justice and modesty. This made him into a hugely effective lobbyist for AIDS FONDS and Stop Aids Now!. And he was much looking forward and excited to be here in Melbourne. A true democrat and an adventurer with a passion for exploring the unknown, at 32 he was far too young to be taken away from us.

Dear fellow delegates, let me conclude by expressing my heartfelt thanks for the many condolences we have received.

My wish is that we continue to be inspired by these wonderful people. Despite impressive progress in recent years, our job is not done yet. We need to step up the pace so as to ultimately beat HIV and AIDS. And in this ambition we need each other more than ever.

Thank you