



Arnhem, 18 September 2009

Welcome speech

Mrs. Sophie Lambrechtsen – ter Horst
Chair of the War Requiem – Bridge to the Future Foundation



Thank you Mr Cornielje for your much-appreciated opening words and for your hospitality in this very special place with a view to the John Frost Bridge, Bridge too Far, Bridge to the Future, Arnhem Bridge.

Allow me to again welcome our keynote speaker President Song, the president of our own Supreme Court Mr Corstens and the other members of the panel (Mrs Thea Hilhorst, Annick van Lookeren Campagne, Eduard Nazarski en last but not least, Major General Ton van Loon). I would like to thank them not just for their willingness to come here today, to connect the past to the future, but most of all for their courage and their continuous efforts to make a difference to people who suffer injustice, to innocent civilians, to humanitarian aid workers as well as to the military in the field.

We feel most honoured by your commitment to our Conference Bridge to the Future, to our lasting commitment to Winston Churchill's *Not in Vain*, spoken only a few days after the Battle of Arnhem.

We thank Shura Lipovsky, Merima Kljucic and Laura Hassler, director of Musicians Without Borders, for their everlasting, terribly beautiful healing work.

In preparing for this year's conference, we have been guided by a vision of a world with access to justice for every deserving individual and in which everyone feels a sense of responsibility towards achieving this.

On a personal note, I am thinking here of the Airborne Prayer

'May the defence of the Most High be above and beneath, around and within us, in our going out and in our coming in, in our rising up and in our going down, through all our days and all our nights, until the dawn when the Sun of Righteousness, with Healing in His Wings, will rise over the peoples of the world'.

Today I will omit the last words: – through Jesus Christ our Lord. While it is true that I have been raised in the west and have been brought up to consider existential questions within a Jewish/Christian framework, it is my belief that in these times of secularisation and a worldwide dissolution of cultural roots and values, we should seek to find a personal connection within the sacred world of universal values.

This is what the Bridge to the Future could come to stand for, a bridge which we should approach with respect (the theme of this year's International Airborne Youth Conference taking place next door), with a willingness to learn to discover what we have in common with others and to reply on our findings. The Sun of Righteousness with Healing in His Wings: justice and reconciliation, universal values.

Coming from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds, we have all recognised the concept of Human Rights.

What an incredible privilege to be allowed to contribute here today at the 65th Airborne Commemoration to the vision of justice for every deserving individual, where we remember John Frost, Sir John Hackett, General Roy Urquhart and all those men of the 1st Airborne Division, who had to stand their ground in Arnhem – not to forget the Germans.

To commemorate, to remember, simply means something like “I’m thinking of you, I keep you in my thoughts’. In doing this over the last decades, we have had the privilege to learn that something positive can come out of war - and with this I do not mean to say that wars can be useful - : the love, the solidarity, that feeling of being connected to one another and that sense of providence. You can find it in my mother's diary, that has just been reprinted, as well as in hundreds of other descriptions of life in wartime. In General Cammaert's words: 'When you return you are either formed or malformed'. I think this is touching on what Shan Hacket called the ‘spiritual victory’. (I am also thinking of what Pim van Lommel, cardiologist in Arnhem and member of our informal think tank, who concluded very convincingly that those who have had a near-death-experience have changed their attitude to life forever; they have lost their fear of death.)

Formed or malformed, we find solace in commemorating, we have shared this experience for the last 65 years. It is a formative process. *Forgetting is exile, remembering is liberation*, in the words of the Baal Sjem Tov. To liberate our consciousness from fear, from unwillingness, from denial - to find that sense of freedom which enables us to make a difference.

That is why, 65 years later, with fewer and fewer veterans among us, we feel the urge to continue the dialogue with the military, with new veterans, in order to bring this process to its conclusion. We need each other, to make sure we do not talk in the abstract, to make sure we consider the reality of war and its inherent injustice. This is what we do to each other. And we need to remember the reality of the constant connection with our universal values, symbolised by the rainbow: *Bridge to the Future, until the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His Wings.*