

Opening address by Hester Bijl

4 May 2022

Welcome everyone,

Thank you all for being here today for this Hour of Remembrance. It is good to spend this hour together here in the Great Auditorium and with those of you who are attending online from your homes. We are here to reflect on the atrocities of the Second World War and to remember all those victims from our University community who lost their lives. Students, staff, alumni – gone from our midst – betrayed, deported and murdered. Today we remember them, with sorrow and respect.

Ben Telders, Irawan Soejono, Carolien van Loen, Arnold Cosman, Arie Bijl.

Five names, five victims, five people from our University community who lost their lives during the Second World War. We continue to keep the memories of these five victims alive with small memorials:

Here in the Academy Building is the Telders auditorium: 75 years after Ben Telders' death, the Small Auditorium was named after this Professor of International Law, resistance fighter and enormous inspiration for the resistance against the Nazis by Leiden professors. Telders died in Bergen Belsen in 1945, nine days before the British liberated the camp.

Irawan Soejono, Leiden student and Indonesian resistance fighter, has a memorial stone devoted to him in the Groenesteeg cemetery in Leiden. He fought against the German occupation and for the liberation of Indonesia. He was shot dead during a raid at Boommarkt in Leiden.

In the University Library there is a plaque commemorating Carolien van Loen, one of our Jewish alumna, who worked in the University Library. She was deported in 1944 and was killed in Auschwitz.

Recently, a Stolperstein – or stumbling stone – bearing the name of Arnold Cosman was unveiled on the doorstep of the same University Library where his house once stood. He, too, was an alumnus of our University, who was driven by despair to take his own life – on the same day that the Netherlands surrendered, in May 1940.

In Oegstgeest a street is named after Ariel Bijl – no relation, but someone to be proud of nonetheless. Arie Bijl was a physicist. He studied, did his PhD and worked at our University, where he conducted research into liquid helium. He was active in the resistance, was arrested and perished in Neuengamme concentration camp in 1944.

Five names, five lost lives. There are 663 names in the *In memoriam* of victims from our University community – and the list isn't complete. For so many of these victims we know only their names, and in some cases not even that. Who were they? What were their lives like? What were their hopes and fears? What was their life story? And how did they die? What was their final journey like?

There is another important Leiden memorial I would like to mention: the six stone suitcases placed in different locations on the streets of our city. Under the title of 'Baggage', they are a reminder of the Jewish residents of our city who perished in the War. One of these memorial suitcases is near our School of Law. An abandoned suitcase, a lost or forgotten suitcase. A suitcase belonging to someone

who didn't return. A thought-provoking memorial that invites us to remember this important part of our history. The artist who designed the memorial tells us that, on the one hand, each suitcase refers to the suitcase that a deportee would take with them, and on the other hand, it refers literally and figuratively to what a person carries with them through life, as well as to what they leave behind. The memorial was unveiled in 2010 and has a striking poignancy.

Fifteen years before, in 1995, one of my predecessors, Rector Lammert Leertouwer, gave a Cleveringa lecture entitled: Cleveringa's suitcase.

The title of his lecture refers to the suitcase that Professor Cleveringa, Dean of the Law Faculty, had made ready. He held his famous lecture on 26 November 1940 in protest against the dismissal of his Jewish colleague Professor Meijer. He knew he would be arrested and taken to the prison in Scheveningen the day after his lecture, so he had packed his suitcase in readiness.

Leertouwer mused on what may have been in Cleveringa's suitcase. What was in his spiritual baggage? What made him decide on this act of resistance? And what do we give our students to put in their suitcases? What do we want them to take with them from their studies and their time in Leiden? Leertouwer detailed some of that baggage: an independent attitude towards those in power, moral resistance against injustice, the painstaking pursuit of knowledge and learning from defeat, critical engagement with the University and the defence of the bastion of freedom.

These values are reflected in our core values today: connecting, innovative, responsible and free. These core values have been characteristic of our University community for centuries. They will also manifest themselves visibly and tangibly at this gathering here today:

We stand here together in silence, connected with one another and with our past.

Three years ago we started a new tradition: as well as the 26 November meetings, we also initiated a gathering on 4 May,

to remember those who took their responsibility in the struggle for freedom and who paid for their courage with their lives.

And we remember all those who did not have the opportunity to live in freedom; who were instead innocent victims of violence and racism.

We remember all the wars and violence that have taken place since 1945 and the war that, to our horror, is also raging in Europe today. The invasion of Ukraine and all the suffering this is causing is also having a major impact on our community. We have set up an emergency fund to help students who have been affected by this war. It's good to see that so much money has already been donated to this good cause.

A two-minute silence. Sixty minutes of stories. Later this evening, at 8 o'clock, the whole nation will be silent, as a mark of respect. Over the coming hour, we will listen to speakers from our community. On behalf of the Executive Board, I would like to thank Pancras Hogendoorn, Willemijn Waal and representatives of the Medical Faculty of Leiden Students for their stories this evening. Stories about lives lost ... lest we should ever forget.