

**Speech Award Ceremony Carnegie Wateler Peace Prize  
by Dr. Bernard R. Bot, Chairman of the Carnegie  
Foundation Peace Palace, 26 September 2018**

*Check against delivery*

Your Excellency's, distinguished guests, members of the Wateler family, and most especially Mr. Vranckx,

Thank you all for being here this afternoon in the Great Hall of Justice of the Peace Palace for the award ceremony of the biannually given Carnegie Wateler Peace Prize.

To honour both national as well as international persons or organizations, the Carnegie Wateler Peace Prize alternates between a Dutch and an international laureate. In 2016 the Prize went to the Dutch laureate, Sigrid Kaag, the current minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, for her successfully led OPCW-UN joint mission on the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons. *(Unfortunately she couldn't make it to be present this afternoon because of the General Assembly of the UN).*

This year the prize goes to an international laureate. However, the Board of the Carnegie Foundation decided to go not that far from home as we found this year's laureate in our neighbouring country Belgium.

Peace and war are a thread through the life of Rudi Vranckx. After being graduated as historian, he started his career at the Center for Peace Research in Leuven, where he made scenarios and films about war and peace. Without knowing yet how many battlefields

he would see in his life. Not on the silver screen in the cinema, but in real life as a journalist. Meanwhile, Rudi Vranckx has been reporting on war conflicts for thirty years.

He started his career as a war correspondent in 1989 reporting on the uprising against Ceausescu in Romania. Over the past decades he has reported on wars and conflicts around the world, including in the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East and North Africa, to draw attention to suffering and injustice in conflict situations. Vranckx was one of the last European journalists to leave Egypt during the violence of the Arab Spring. A job, or maybe even a way of life, that is not without risks. During an attack in Syria he lost his French colleague. The board of the Carnegie Foundation recognizes his enormous courage to travel to the most dangerous conflict areas in the world.

In his reports and his many books Mr. Vranckx shows us the lives of many people in conflict areas. Thanks to his beautiful, in-depth, honest and sometimes heart-breaking stories he gives those people a face. Stories of ordinary people, about human beings just like you and me, but with a lot of impact. The stories of Vranckx inspire and encourage others to take action or at least ensure that those people are not forgotten. Because when we are talking about war situations we are talking about the lives of many women, men and children. A whole future generation that is at stake.

The future generation deserves our attention and cooperation. Therefore I was very delighted to also work together this year with the different youth organizations in the framework of the *Youth*

*Carnegie Peace Prize*. It gives me so much hope to see the younger generations so engaged with peacebuilding – to see them forging a better future, a more peaceful world. Not only for their own generation, but for all of us.

This brings me back to the founding father of our Foundation, Andrew Carnegie. In all his ideas, he was dominated by an intense belief in the future, in progress, in education and in a future without war. His spirit as well as his faith in the ability of individuals to better themselves, and thus the society in which they live, is a beacon of light for future generations to follow.

The Carnegie Foundation Peace Palace hosted the last three days the first edition of the Carnegie PeaceBuilding Conversations. Cooperation was the thread through the programme. Cooperation between different worlds and players is essential for promoting peace. Cooperation starts with mutual understanding. The Carnegie PeaceBuilding Conversations generated fresh perspectives on peacebuilding and conflict resolutions through dialogue between persons from various backgrounds, including those directly affected by conflicts and future generations. Such new perspectives are much needed in view of the increasing complexity of situations involving conflicts and peace.

The Conversations also explored how private capital and philanthropic efforts can be effectively tied to public goals to promote peace, now and for the generations to come; peace philanthropy in the spirit of Andrew Carnegie and Johan Wateler.

Thanks to the latter we are all gathered here tonight. The Dutch banker Johan Wateler drew up a will during the first World War, in 1916, that stipulated that an important philanthropic legacy should be given to the State of the Netherlands with the aim of awarding an annual peace prize after his death. When his will was made public, the Netherlands parliament felt it had to renounce the honor of deciding and awarding this prize as this might be considered as too political an act. It wanted to avoid any accusations of being biased towards one particular person or institution.

And that is how the Carnegie Foundation was appointed as the authority responsible for the selection and adjudication of the prize. As a foundation we are very proud of this responsibility to award this peace prize to a person or institution which has distinguished itself in the pursuit of peace.

During a big part of Wateler 's life the free and independent European press flourished. Throughout the First World War, the press was the principal medium of news distribution. Along with the war there was a drop in newspaper titles on the market compared to the pre-war years. This was partly due to a lack of resources. Yet, the main reasons were the censorship measures, which were imposed on all newspapers from the beginning of the First World War. The evolution of an approximately free and independent European press since the mid-nineteenth century suddenly ended.

Afterwards journalism has evolved enormously throughout the twentieth and twentieth first century. But still like in the days of Wateler, journalism plays an important role in preventing wars and achieving peace. Through its capacity to investigate, journalism can help people question established ideas and reflect on pressing issues. On the other hand, the way information is distributed can also contribute to escalate conflict, providing information that is manipulated. In this sense, journalism and mass media greatly shape and impact societies.

As a renowned journalist on international conflicts, the newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* even calls him the best war correspondent in the Dutch language area, Rudi Vranckx has shown us the effect of conflict on daily life with personal reports. He reported on many wars for the Flemish public broadcaster foundation VRT and the Dutch public broadcaster Foundation NOS. During the last years mainly in Iraq and Syria.

The board believes that access to independent information is crucial in the transformation to peace or in the prevention of escalating conflicts. A journalist that contributes to peace, focuses on trying to humanize all victims of a conflict, seeking to uncover the complexities behind violent driven situations. Mr. Rudi Vranckx puts all of this, in the best way, in practice.

Vranckx has shown his outstanding commitment to reporting from conflict areas, giving people affected by conflict a face and a voice. Apart from showing the world the drama and injustice of conflicts

as a journalist, Vranckx has shown exceptional personal engagement with the inhabitants of conflict areas.

When he came across a music school in the Iraqi city of Mosul that was completely destroyed by IS in 2017, Vranckx started a collection of musical instruments in his home country Belgium. He finally delivered the 120 collected instruments to the music school himself. His documentary about this project, 'Imagine Mosul', managed to touch many. Back home, he followed up on the project by raising money for an organisation that provides music lessons to young refugees in Belgium. An initiative that deserves huge recognition.

I think that it is most fitting for all these reasons that the Carnegie Wateler Peace Prize 2018 is handed to you, Mr. Rudi Vranckx, in this place, the Peace Palace, an icon for peace and justice.

Before I will hand over the prize, I would like to ask for a few more moments of your attention for a short film about Mr. Vranckx that illustrates his hard work and passion.