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**Speech on behalf of the jury, to be presented on the 9th of December 2016, on the occasion of the awarding of the MA Thesis Prize “Visions on Peace”**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I introduce the next part of today’s programme: the award ceremony for the Thesis Prize “Visions on Peace”. This is the ninth year that the prize is handed out, to recognize the best MA Thesis in the field of peace studies, broadly defined.

With the election of Donald Trump and other populists around the world, it remains to be seen whether the numerous interstate and intrastate violent conflicts will be resolved more easily.

Still, it is encouraging to see how many young people are interested in issues like war and peace. After all, not only will they be the academics of tomorrow, they will also be future policy-makers, activists and peace advocates. It is definitely a sign of hope that there are people out there who in fact have a “vision on peace”.

**Sponsors**

Before I introduce the jury of the 2016 “Visions on Peace” MA Thesis Prize, I would like to say: “welcome and thank you!” to the representatives of the organizations involved:

* The Dutch Foundation for Peace Sciences, which was the founder of this prize nine years ago, then together with IKV Pax Christi.
* UPEACE The Hague, which joined the club three years ago and has proven very helpful with regard to the organizational aspects of the thesis prize.
* ASN Bank, which has contributed financially.

**Jury**

This year, the jury of the MA Thesis Prize “Visions on Peace” consisted of:

* Lidewyde Berckmoes, Postdoc Researcher at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement, Amsterdam
* Erin Wilson, director of the Center for Religion, Conflict and the Public Domain, at the Faculty of Theology and Religious studies at the Univ of Groningen
* And myself, Tom Sauer, Associate Professor in International Politics, Department of Political Science, University of Antwerp, Belgium

The jury could not have functioned without the invaluable assistance of Petra van der Ham from UPEACE The Hague, so Petra: thank you very much!

**About the prize**

The purpose of the Visions on Peace award is to stimulate research in peace studies, a very broad area of studies encompassing many different disciplines and areas of expertise, from philosophy, politics and sociology, to law, criminology, history and anthropology.

Apart from the many different epistemologies that guide the field of peace studies, the field is also very diverse in terms of research questions explored, research methods employed and units of analysis explored; from doctrinal analysis of law; policies and institutional structures created to implement conflict‐prevention strategies; to focused, ethnographic studies of specific conflict‐affected communities in remote locations, where people struggle to rebuild their communities.

The dynamics of conflict and the reconstruction of societies after a war, cry out for a continuation of critical and innovative peace research. The jury wishes to acknowledge that scientific knowledge, while sometimes overvalued, is also under‐appreciated in developing practical steps to bring peace and to promote justice.

**About the entries**

This year, the jury received 42 theses. As ever, the topics were extremely mixed: from research about institutionalized racism in Canada, to the reaction of the UN SC to the Ebola outbreak, to children's political agency in Palestine, to NATO and cyber security, to an analysis of the EU mission in Mali, to transformative justice in Myanmar.

In addition to the wide range of disciplines and topics, the research papers we received emanated from many different faculties and institutions. We were pleased to receive submissions from graduates of political science, law, anthropology, international relations, development studies, conflict studies and regional specializations. Candidates attended the University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, the University of Groningen, Amsterdam Free University, Utrecht University, the International Institute of Social Studies, Wageningen University, the Erasmus University Rotterdam, Tilburg University, and Maastricht University.

What is perhaps also interesting to know, is that approximately 45% of the candidates are Dutch, the other 55% are “internationals” (coming from 12 different countries), more than last year. 25 of the candidates are female, 17 male.

As in previous years, the jury found the diversity of the entries to be immensely gratifying; we believe that multi-disciplinarity is a real asset of the thesis prize!

**About the criteria and the selection process**

As the jury is unable to read every submitted thesis in full, candidates are requested to submit a summary, highlighting the key points of their thesis. Thanks to the help of UPEACE The Hague, all the entries were presented to the jury as anonymous papers. The first selection was made on the basis of a careful reading of the 42 summaries. Each jury member, independently, made an initial shortlist of research papers that he/she wanted to read in full. After making our individual selections, the jury discussed the shortlists. In the end, the jury selected six theses for the second round of the selection process. This part was both interesting and challenging, given the variety of theses and the difficulty of comparing very different examples of scholarship. The papers that we read in full were assessed with the help of a range of criteria, dealing with scientific quality, the level of theoretical and empirical argument, originality, relevance to the work of organizations in the peace sector, and readiness for publication. After the jury members had scored each paper – again individually – it was clear that some papers scored better than other papers.

**The nominees and the presentations**

In alphabetical order, the nominated students are:

**Johannes Chinchilla: "***Growing Sustainable Peace: Starting at the Roots? A case study on the influence of grassroots leadership and top-down infrastructure interventions on local peacebuilding processes in Medellin (Colombia)"*

University of Amsterdam, International Development Studies

**Marieke Schöning**: "*To be or not to be political: Questions to international development discourse through an investigation of active youth citizenship among young, educated Syrians in Beirut"*

University of Amsterdam, International Development Studies

**Melanie van der Lem**: "*The Divergent Trajectories of Corporation-community Mining Conflicts in Peru"*

Leiden University, Politics – Conflict and Cooperation

We are delighted that you, Johannes Chincilla, Marieke Schöning, and Melanie van der Lem, are with us today, with your friends and families who are undoubtedly very proud of your accomplishments. Thanks for the excellent presentations.

**Announcing the winner**

I think that it goes without saying why these three theses were nominated. They are critical, current, and original; they all present an innovative approach to the analysis of war and peace in contemporary international relations; and they all make important and excellent contributions to the academic debate in their respective fields.

That being said, there was one thesis that stood out, in a number of ways. The award-winning research project is extremely timely as a peace deal has been recently signed in Colombia, for which the president has received the Nobel Peace Prize, something that the author of the master thesis could not have known. The deal was rejected in a referendum, but the two parties reconfirmed the improved deal very recently. This thesis focuses on the role of grassroots leadership on peacebuilding in one of the best known cities of Colombia: Medellin. For this, the author traveled to Medellin and interviewed 54 people. The author did not only a very nice job empirically; he also went back to the theory and tried to improve the theory on the basis of what he has learned on the ground.

In short, as you will have guessed by now, the jury was very impressed with the thesis **"***Growing Sustainable Peace: Starting at the Roots?"*, and has decided to award the 2016 MA Thesis Prize “Visions on Peace” to Johannes Chinchilla. Congratulations!

Before ASN Bank hands over the prize, the jury would like to use this opportunity to thank all three nominated students for submitting such excellent work, and to wish Johannes Chincilla, Marieke Schöning, and Melanie van der Lem the very best in their future career.

Congratulations once again; and thank you very much for your attention.