

## **Record number of attendees at Day of the International Student**

The World Forum in the Hague came alive with festivities on Saturday afternoon and evening, bringing back memories of the days when the North Sea Jazz Festival was hosted here, but the outfits of the thousands of partygoers was an indication that this was a different kind of event: they were all wearing the orange T-shirt of the Day of the International Student. Nuffic had once again sent the customary invitations to all international students in the Netherlands to gather in The Hague for a big meeting and on 8 November 2008 it turned out that more students than ever before had accepted this invitation. Many missed the performance of the Senegalese Percussion Group Sène Percu and the welcome speeches by Nuffic's Director-General Sander van den Eijnden, the Dutch Minister for Education Ronald Plasterk and the Mayor of The Hague, Jozias van Aartsen, because there were simply no more seats in the packed concert hall of the World Forum. The number of visitors is estimated to be well over 2000.

### **Minister**

Nuffic organizes this event every year as an expression of gratitude for the fact that these international students have chosen to study in the Netherlands rather than another country. The fact that the Minister for Education, Culture and Science gave a speech at the event shows how important this is for the Netherlands. Another indicator of this is the attendance of the Mayor of The Hague. His presence also corresponds with the fact that The Hague promotes itself worldwide as an international city of peace, justice and security and, as a result of this, of the practice of law. The city hosts a few thousand international students at its various higher education institutions. Mayor van Aartsen made it clear that he and his city are very proud of this.

### **Theory and reality**

Nuffic's Director-General Sander van den Eijnden stressed this gratitude in his welcome speech. He proceeded to show a specific example of the main characteristic of Dutch higher education: he held up a storm-proof umbrella, developed by two students of the Delft University of Technology, that can withstand storms of up to gale force 10. Van den Eijnden argued that it seems like a simple invention, probably based on a sudden insight, but such an insight only comes to you after extensive study that, in a sense, creates a climate for this eureka effect, through the acquisition of broad and profound background knowledge. International students in the Netherlands experience this in real terms: their lecturers are constantly looking for a match between theory and practical application, for the connection between applied research and fundamental analysis.

### **Juggling**

The Day of the International Student was a mix between a huge party, a conference, a seminar and an opportunity to meet people. After the opening by the minister and the mayor, students could sign up for lots of workshops that varied from scientific to pure fun. Professor Ludo Beheydt, an expert on Dutch culture from neighbouring Belgium, gave a crash course in knowledge of the Netherlands, but there were also workshops of a very different kind on offer: juggling, clog painting, making masks. Elsewhere in the building, Nuffic's Kasia Tyrybon and Shirley van Maren hosted a meeting of students who were asked how their expectations had been met by the Dutch higher education institutions. Furthermore, there was a workshop about leadership of the future and about the possibilities for international students to find a job in the Netherlands after obtaining their degree.

At the same time an information market took place at the DIS Plaza in the big hall on the ground floor of the World Forum, where Dutch businesses presented themselves side by side with alumni associations from a large number of countries. These associations bring together people with a background of study in the Netherlands, for them to stay in touch with the Netherlands and to

form networks for mutual support. Membership of such an alumni association is a useful investment for the future, as was shown at the various stands. Alumni help each other use their Dutch degree or diploma for the best possible career result.

Throughout the day people from the same country of origin, studying at different places in the Netherlands, met up with each other. Various members of the diplomatic corps from The Hague, like the Kenyan Ambassador, attended the event to have informal discussions with students from their countries.

During the Day of the International Student Kerstin Schweighöfer, President of the Foreign Press Association in the Netherlands, gave a lecture on the theme of "How to survive the low countries", which was followed by a panel discussion. Her lecture was a great success, but one thing was abundantly clear: the international students are doing extremely well in their host country. They are being given their full due and they are having a great time.

### **Unadulterated fun**

In the evening it was time for some unadulterated fun at the party. International students from the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague had formed a jazz band that added a light bossa nova element to their sound, to get the party going. As in previous years, DJ Bus also put up a good show. The party was finished off with the band Blend — famous for its covers of easy-to-dance-to songs. Meanwhile, students had also, by means of cheering and clapping, chosen the winners of the fashion show with models in traditional dress. Mrs Lin Ting-Ting from China won the prize in the ladies' contest with a traditional robe that people in China have worn for three thousand years. In the men's contest Aschalew Assefa Haile from Ethiopia triumphed with a ceremonial costume.