

ICRH celebrates its 20th anniversary
5 December, 4pm in Het Pand, Gent (Belgium)

Speaking points of Prof. dr. Paul Van Cauwenberghe

Former Vice-Chancellor of Ghent University

Your Excellencies,

Professor Temmerman,

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is for me a great honour to be invited to give a short speech at the celebration of 20 years of ICRH.

As a former dean of the Medical Faculty and as the former vice-chancellor of Ghent University, I had the pleasure of witnessing the birth and the growth of this centre. And this was not just watching from far what was happening. I was member of the board of ICRH and I had the opportunity to see from close what the centre really performed, in Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa and China.

When I said “the centre”, I meant the people working in and for ICRH. In first instance I mention the founder, Mama Daktari and Mylady Professor Marleen Temmerman.

I got to know Marleen already when she was a student; I am a few years older and a young staff member when I saw her appearing in our department, with her henna coloured curly hair. She was already then very socially committed and critical in a very positive and polite way, an attitude that she still has.

She wanted to become gynecologist and obstetrician. But due to the narrow sight of the professor who had to select who could start the training (he said that this specialty was a too difficult job for a woman!), she had to find an other university hospital for her training. And thus she moved to the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. She also studied and worked at the Tropical Institute in Antwerp and spent about ten full years in Africa. It was not an easy and comfortable job but I guess these were the best years of her life, because she could work and

live with the people she likes and who needed her help.

Luckily for Ghent University she came back to us to make a remarkable academic career. She did not only reach the highest professor's rank, but she was also extremely productive in research having a record high number of promotorships of PhD-theses. But that she could combine this with a very busy and high level clinical practice is something I could not understand. But this shows that she is really a manager. She showed this in running ICRH and in her political career and directorship in WHO.

She had a good mentor, Professor Peter Piot, and she has some extraordinary people working with her and supporting her. I mention here especially her husband Lou, an expert in about everything you can imagine and who offers his expertise with love to his wife. I also mention the late Professor Patricia Claeys, Mr. Dirk Van Braeckel and Professor Olivier Degomme.

What Marleen performed is in fact also what we can find in the activities of ICRH. It is a group where education, research and service to society is intermingled and where each part is supporting the other parts. And this is done in a very collegial and humble way. I never forget the sessions I attended in Kenya where Marleen and some of her collaborators discussed with sex workers all kind of practical problems they experience when doing their job. In fact she did not really instruct or correct, but she listened, advised and helped. Not only reproductive and sexual health are important for her and ICRH, but the whole health and well being of the women is.

I am very happy that vice prime minister and minister for Development Cooperation, Mr. Alexander De Croo is present here. This shows his interest in what ICRH has performed and will continue to do. I am sure that he, and the whole federal government, will keep supporting the valuable projects in development cooperation, even in this period of budget cuts. It is tempting to reduce funding of items that are not directly visible for the own population. It is a danger that cooperation development could fall in this category. I trust that our governments (federal and regional) realize that it is the duty of rich countries to support the people in developing countries who have much more reasons to complain than we have. To Dr. Sleurs, state secretary for a.o. Science Policy, but who is also gynecologist, I do not have to explain that service to community and education is only valuable and trustworthy when it is based on research, both basic and applied, including clinical. She nows! I hope that research will also be sufficiently supported, even if it is done in developing countries.

Finally I want to plea to the university leaders that they support and reward the activity of their academic and other personnel in developping countries. It is not tourism what they do there. It is hard work, and our duty.

I congratulate all the people working in and for ICRH with their20 years anniversary and I wish them all the best for the future.

Professor Paul Van Cauwenberge, MD, PhD, FRCP

Prorector, Ghent University

Honorary Dean, Medical Faculty, Ghent University