

## **Fifteenth anniversary of the Prince Claus Chair**

### **Young scientists are making a difference in the development of the global south**

On 12 April, the Prince Claus Chair celebrated its fifteenth anniversary. In the presence of Her Majesty Queen Máxima and Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrix of the Netherlands, chairholders, post docs and other guests discussed the ideas of the late Prince Claus which led to the foundation of the Chair. The main question: how do we pass these ideas and insights down to the next generation?

On a crisp April morning, small groups of a hundred or so citizens of the world walked across the gravel-paved square, up the marble steps, past the sentries and into the Noordeinde Palace in the Dutch city of The Hague. Of course, they were actually Queen Máxima and Princess Beatrix of the Netherlands, as well as professors and postdocs, rectors, deans and students of Dutch universities, as well as civil servants and colleagues from the NGO world. But, as EU Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, Carlos Moedas recalled later that day, “Hadn’t the very man who brought us together here, the late Prince Claus, once called himself a ‘citizen of the world’?” As they saw pictures of the work of the chairholders projected on large screens, many in the ballroom of the palace must have understood that they, too, were citizens of the world, with a shared responsibility for improving the lives of citizens everywhere.

### **Solutions embedded in society**

Some of the guests were from the generation that often encountered the prince on TV or had even met him personally. They remember his ideas about development collaboration, ideas that amount to not looking for “clever solutions”, but “solutions embedded in society”, as Queen Máxima, honorary patron of the Prince Claus Chair, described it in her opening speech. Solutions contrived by “young academics from around the world who are committed to creating favourable conditions for people in the global south.”

### **The future is to blockchain**

“But how do we pass on the ideas of Prince Claus to the next generation?” moderator Petra Stienen asked the participants. EU Commissioner Moedas had a suggestion. He envisioned a key role for young academics from the world of science and technology. This is where our efforts should be focused. After all, “if we don’t invest in science, there will be no development.” Moedas is particularly interested in digital developments. According to him, the future is to blockchain. The future of development, that is. “With blockchain, the right to property, for example of land, once registered can never be taken. And whereas in today’s production chain, most of what we pay goes to intermediaries, with blockchain it goes to whomever has created value directly.” Blockchain will therefore increase people’s independence and bring people together.

### **Technology projects as the driving force**

South African Minister of Higher Education and Training, Naledi Pandor, could not have agreed more. She also referred to Prince Claus, “who said we have to be careful not to presume that when you make aid available to a country, development will follow.” It takes more than that, Pandor said. Science and technology, for example, are the two most important sectors in which her still young country needs to introduce greater equality and democracy. “Which is a challenge,” she said, “when you know that we lack research-intensive universities.”

But South Africa is making progressing with grants, fellowships and prizes aimed at convincing young people to enter research, but also with technology projects that act as a driving force, such as the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), the large radio telescope project to be implemented in Australia and South Africa. “Not only do we have big tech companies involved and South Africa becoming part of global research collaboration, but we are also seeing a surge of young people entering engineering and mathematics.”

### **Catch ‘em young**

Speaking of the young, Pandor is followed by three bright and bold representatives of the National Think Tank. Their motto: “Don’t talk *about* us, talk *with* us.” Asked by the Curatorium of the Prince Claus Chair to come up with ways to pass on the values of Prince Claus to the next generation, they organised a pressure cooker weekend some months ago, which resulted in ten solutions, two of which were presented at the seminar. One of them was

the establishment of a youthful board, a form of ‘Occupy the Prince Claus Chair’, which would take over the role of the Curatorium for one week per year in order to bring in fresh new ideas. Another solution devised by the young thinkers was a global development game called ‘Terra Nova X,’ aimed at encouraging children to talk about world problems. The idea of the game is to assign islands in the ocean to groups of children, create levels of inequality (with some islands being richer in resources than others) and have them discuss ways to overcome this imbalance. Playing the game in pilot sessions left no doubt, as the three members of the National Think Tank commented: “Listening to young people pays off, so catch ‘em young.”

### **Teaching the young is key**

The Think Tank presentation set in motion the kind of cross-pollination the Prince Claus Chair has become famous for, with some of the chairholders and postdocs present asking whether the Terra Nova X game was patented or if it was free for them to use in lectures and classes. For “to involve the next generation we have to teach them,” said Rianne van den Ham (postdoc to chairholder Fatima Suleman). “Inspire them to look beyond the borders of their field.”

### **Balance is crucial**

What did the chairholders of the past five years have to say? In response to previous speakers, professor Suleman, the South African holder of the Prince Claus Chair 2016-2018, warned against focusing too much on the next generation. “There is so much we can gain from past generations in terms of values and principles,” she said. Indian professor Saradindu Bhaduri held the Chair from 2015 to 2017 and talked about the balance between research and policymaking, saying that “on the one hand young researchers have to be curious, and on the other hand policymakers have to stimulate a spirit of inquiry.” Holder of the Chair between 2012 and 2014, Aylin Küntay from Turkey endorsed the contribution that technology can make to enhance human interaction. “In my field [of language and the socio-cognitive development of children], robotics are now used to teach a second language to the very young.” Chilean professor Javier Couso, chairholder from 2014-2016, argued in favour of a balance between science and technology on the one hand and social studies and humanities on the other. “In recent decades, we have seen technological progress,” he claimed, “but a regression in human rights and democracy. What can humanities learn from hard science to

redress this balance?” he wondered. Jumoke Oduwole, chairholder from 2013 to 2015, agreed, arguing that “one thing the humanities can learn from hard science is how to create communities.”

### **A living thing**

Referring to the comments made by Couso and Oduwole, Professor Louise Gunning-Schepers, Chair of the Curatorium of the Prince Claus Chair, joked that it was fortunate the Chair was based in the Netherlands. “Because in Dutch we do not distinguish between social studies and humanities. We have one word which includes it all, ‘wetenschap’. And when, in a few moments, we propose a toast to the fifteenth anniversary of the Chair, let’s celebrate the difference young scientists have made and will continue to make in the development of the global south. For regardless of their disciplines, it is up our chairholders to make sure the Prince Claus Chair will remain a living thing.”