

*Anne Frank-lezing door Eberhard van der Laan, burgemeester van Amsterdam*

Ladies and Gentlemen, boys and girls,

It's a very special honour for me to be at the school here in Hanoi that bears the name of the city where I am the mayor: the Hanoi-Amsterdam high school. I am proud that Amsterdam was involved in establishing this school, which, thanks to the efforts of its Vietnamese teachers, is one of the best schools in Vietnam.

On a trip like this one and in my position as mayor, I meet many high officials and directors. You represent the young generation of Vietnamese, and I am delighted to meet you as well.

Today is the day we commemorate human rights. On this date in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. This declaration addresses the question of what it means to be human. What is the value of a human being? This can't be expressed in money, but it can be expressed in rights. If you are aware of those rights, then you know what human dignity means and when it is being threatened.

My talk is about the young girl Anne Frank from Amsterdam. For those who aren't familiar with her, there are parallels with the young Vietnamese girl Dang Thuy Tram, and my talk is about her too.

Although Vietnam and the Netherlands are geographically far apart, there is much that joins us. Hanoi and Amsterdam are two large, flourishing cities full of activity.

But our countries also bear scars from the past. These are the scars of wars that had an enormous impact and that can still be seen and felt today.

We don't have to have experienced war ourselves in order to know something about it. I know about war from the stories of my parents, who were caught up in it. Perhaps some of you have also heard stories from your relatives, although not everyone likes to talk about their war experiences.

But we also know about the past from the diaries that people kept during the war. These are our written witnesses. We cherish these diaries even more if the authors are no longer with us. Anne Frank speaks to us through her diaries. While we read her words, we are aware of her absence and the reasons behind it. This makes the diary even more touching.

Dang Thuy Tram and Anne Frank never knew each other. Their wars were fought at different times and on different continents. There are more differences. To name just one, Anne Frank

had no choice; she had to go into hiding. Dang Thuy Tram did have a choice, and she made a very honourable one.

Dang Thuy Tram's diary gives us an insight into the thoughts and emotions of a young woman who, in 1967, decided to risk her life to save the lives of others. She was then 23 years old, born in Hanoi and trained as a doctor. Her parents weren't wealthy, but she lacked for little. Nevertheless, she decided to give up her comfortable life and to use her medical knowledge for the benefit of the National Liberation Front.

For three years Dang Thuy Tram worked in the jungle, where she tried to save the lives of many young soldiers. In June 1970, she herself was killed in an exchange of fire.

Right up to her death, she continued to write in her diary. She was no longer a child, she wrote, but rather she had become an adult. But she was also lonely: "No, I am no longer a child. I have grown up. I have passed trials of peril, but somehow, at this moment, I yearn deeply for Mom's caring hand. Even the hand of a dear one or that of an acquaintance would be enough. " Two days later Dang Thuy Tram died, just 23 years old.

On 11 April 1944 Anne Frank wrote an entry in her diary. She was then 14 years old, and she wrote that she was becoming more and more independent of her parents. She wrote: " If only I can be myself, I'll be satisfied. I know that I'm a woman, a woman with inner strength and a great deal of courage! (...) I'll make my voice heard; I'll go out into the world and work for mankind! I now know that courage and happiness are needed first!" When Anne wrote this, she and her family plus four other people had already been hiding for two years in the back part of a house on the Prinsengracht in Amsterdam. They were hiding from the Nazis, who had occupied the Netherlands in 1940 and who wanted to expel and kill all of the Jews there. Shortly after Anne had written this passage, the occupants in hiding were betrayed and transported to a German concentration camp. Anne died there from illness and hardship. Anne Frank was then only 15 years old.

Dang Thuy Tram and Anne Frank very much wanted to be themselves in a world that made this wish impossible. This began for Anne Frank when she was only 4 and her parents decided to flee their native country of Germany after the Nazis had come to power in 1933. The Frank family went to Amsterdam to be themselves without fear of persecution simply because they were Jewish.

This is the history of Amsterdam. For centuries, Amsterdam has been a city that people come to if they are being persecuted in their own country because of who or what they are. For these people, Amsterdam has always been and still is a refuge where they can and may be

themselves and where they are protected from persecution. This has made Amsterdam what it is today: a lively and wealthy city where people from all over the world have come to live a meaningful life in their own way.

But Amsterdam is also the city where the scars of the war, the occupation and the persecution of many inhabitants are still tangible. Amsterdam still carries the traces of the war. The Second World War shapes our view of the world, our understanding of good and evil. But Amsterdam is now also a city of nearly 180 nationalities that bring their own histories, wars and scars.

This is why *being yourself* in Amsterdam also means getting along with people who differ in all sorts of ways from you. And to do this, you need to realize that you form a community with people who have other convictions and feelings, who base their choices on a moral compass that differs from yours.

Mankind doesn't have a very attractive history when it comes to accepting and living with people who are *different*. Nonetheless, people often join together to support acceptance, tolerance, humanity and protection. We are capable of triumphing over the hate that wars instil in us. We have a choice.

Dang Thuy Tram and Anne Frank show us the importance of making good choices and teach us what it means to be human. In Hanoi, in Amsterdam, and throughout the world. They teach us to think about the choices we make, about wanting to be yourself among others who are often very different. Even though these young women weren't aware of the official Universal Declaration of Human Rights, their diaries themselves form a declaration of human rights, one written straight from the heart.

I hope that you will be moved by the diaries, just like so many other young people all over the world. The future of this lovely country lies in your hands too; you not only determine your own life by doing your best at school, but you also determine the direction in which this beautiful city, this great country, will find its way.

I wish you all much success.