



Laudation Comenius Award 2019

to Mrs Mardjan Seighali on March 30th 2019 in the Grote Kerk of Naarden

by prof. dr. DD Breimer, Chairman of the Jury

Your Excellencies, Mr Mayor, Mrs Seighali,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Comenius Award was established in 2011 to draw attention to the ideas of Jan Amos Comenius and the way in which this resonates in our times.

And this is done by paying tribute to people who, in line with Comenius' thinking and actions, draw attention to the importance of education, training, science and culture in an increasingly international society in an eye-catching and appealing way.

The coherence between these elements is an important principle of the Comenius Award. On the one hand, because they stem directly from the philosophy that forms the basis of Comenius' life and writings. On the other hand also because the Comenius Award is not a science prize, but rather wants to be a tribute to people who are succesfull in making various areas of knowledge available to society in a coherent and excellent manner. This year, education is especially in the interest of the Comenius Foundation and the jury took this into account when choosing the 2019 award winner.

So today the award is presented to Mrs Mardjan Seighali, director of the UAF Refugee Foundation. According to the jury, she has made an impressive contribution to society in general since her arrival in the Netherlands. In particular in supporting refugee students to be educated and thereby able to create a future for themselves; a decent life with a suitable function in society.

Mrs. Seighali was born and raised in Iran and came herself to the Netherlands as a refugee in 1990 with her two small children - Comenius also came to our country as a refugee. She has followed various training courses and held positions in, among other things, youth care, Heritage Netherlands. Social and cultural involvement was always a very characteristic part of all these functions. She was a member of the Almere municipal council for 8 years and she currently holds various other positions in organizations with an important social objective, including human rights.

Ms. Seighali has been the director of the Foundation for Refugee Students UAF since 2013, who has played such an incredibly important role since 1948 in providing financial and other support to refugees seeking education and finding a job. That role has only increased since her appointment. The UAF not only supports students in university education, but also - and increasingly - students in HBO and MBO. In 2018 it was a record number that made use of the support from the UAF, more than 3800!

Education! Education! It enables people who have fled to our country to build a new future. That facilitates the UAF. But Ms Seighali also successfully inspires employers to jointly develop dual refugee pathways that directly contribute to better training and labor market

opportunities. This is how she manages that wonderful organization that is the UAF and she represents the UAF in an excellent way at numerous organizations and on many occasions. She is permanently passionate about encouraging and motivating people and organizations to offer support to refugees who want to build a future in our country and become part of our society.

And then I return to the ideas of Comenius and especially the great importance that he attached to good education. Earlier this month, Comenius' book "All-inclusive teaching - the Didacta Magna" was published in Dutch again, now translated by the unsurpassed Comenius expert Professor Henk Woldring. In that book it becomes clear how much the views of Comenius fit in with the present. His teaching is characterized by transcending fragmentary knowledge and practicing an interdisciplinary approach at all stages of life. Then a person - he says - can better understand the coherence of the phenomena and also propagate it broadly to promote a better world. In the jury's opinion, you, Ms. Seighali, have not only literally followed the footsteps of Comenius as a refugee yourself, but you have, through your work, and through the organization that you represent, the UAF, fully acted and still do so. You are an example of someone who successfully succeeds in serving various areas in a coherent and excellent manner to our increasingly international society. In the conversation I had with you, you also said that you have been inspired by Comenius for some time. You have visited the museum / mausoleum several times and in recent years you have also attended the awarding of this prize several times out of sheer interest. Well, it is a great pleasure for us as a jury that you, Mrs Mardjan Seighali, will be awarded the Comenius Award 2019 so well deserved.

I said on behalf of the jury.

Prof. dr. Douwe D. Breimer