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## NIASD NEWSLETTER APRIL 2008

### 1. Introduction

We are happy to inform you about the activities which have recently taken place in the Netherlands Institute for Academic Studies in Damascus (NIASD).

### 2. Institutional and Organizational

*Work Visit of Director-General Higher Education, Professional Education and Science, Dr. L.J. Roborgh, to Syria (15-18 January 2008)*



*Dr. Roborgh (middle) with NIASD staff*

The Director-General for Higher Education, Professional Education and Science of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science visited the NIASD and held talks with the staff of the institute. Mr. Roborgh also visited the the Syrian Vice-Minister of Technical Affairs of the Syrian Ministry of Education, dr. Fouad Ghalloul, and gave a speech about the internationalization of Dutch Higher Education during a work lunch at the residence of the Dutch Ambassador to Syria. This lunch was attended by dr. Fouad Ghalloul, dr. Wael Mualla (the President of Damascus University), dr. Abdul Ghani Maa Bared (the

President of the Arab International University) and by several experts involved in the EU-funded project “Upgrading the Higher Education Sector in Syria”.

*NIASD Annual Report 2007 (30 March 2008)*

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2008, the NIASD finalized its annual report on 2007 and sent it to Leiden University, which in turn sent it to the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The glossy version of the Annual Report 2007 is being printed presently, while the PDF version is available on [www.niasd.org](http://www.niasd.org).

*Visits NIASD deputy director to Leiden University and the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (17 February and 21 April 2008)*

In February NIASD deputy director Taco van der Zwaag visited Leiden University to discuss current affairs including proposals for foundation statute amendments allowing for the set up of an advisory council. In April he visited the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to discuss the annual report 2007 and new policy plans in the field of the internationalization of Dutch higher education.

*Kameran Sadoun replaces NIASD employee Waleed Shekho (1 April 2008)*

Waleed Shekho, NIASD's general utility and security man since January 2006, left the institute at the end of March 2008 so as to fulfill his military service. Kameran Sadoun (see picture), who studied English in Damascus, replaces Waleed.



### **3. Science and Education**

*Promotion Dutch Higher Education: Educational Fairs: Damascus (9-11 March 2008), Lattakia (16-17 March 2008), Beirut, Lebanon (17-20 April 2008)*

The NIASD provided information about bachelor and master programmes available in Holland at ETEX Education and Training Exhibition in Damascus, from 9-11 March, and in Lattakia on 16 and 17 March 2008. The NIASD for the first time also participated in a fair in Lebanon: the Forum for Orientation & Recruitment Forward 2008 at Biel Solidere in the central district of Beirut, from 17-20 April 2008.



*Promotion Dutch Higher Education: Yara Younes contracted as Fontys representative in Syria (18 March 2008)*

On the 18th of March 2008 the NIASD, the Institute of Marketing Management of Fontys University of Applied Sciences and Yara Younes concluded a contract through which the NIASD facilitates promotional work of Yara Younes as Fontys representative in Syria. The contract allows Yara to use the institute's facilities and to join it at educational fairs. It also regulates the administrative responsibilities which the NIASD takes up regarding Yara's work. The contract runs until the end of 2008.

*Promotion of Dutch Higher Education: NIASD present at the NUFFIC training week in The Hague (8-11 April 2008)*

NIASD free lance assistant Martijn Leeftink participated in the training week for Dutch institutes abroad delivered by the Netherlands organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education, NUFFIC, in The Hague. Various aspects of the general promotion of Dutch Higher Education abroad were covered in this training week, such as promotion materials, fairs, branding, scholarships and so-called mobstacles. On the 8th of April, the training week started with attending the annual congress of the NUFFIC.

*Promotion Dutch Higher Education: Study in Holland-presentation at the American University of Beirut, in Beirut, Lebanon (17 April 2008)*

With the kind co-operation and assistance of the American University of Beirut, a Study in Holland-presentation was delivered in that prestigious university on the 17th of April, 2008, by NIASD free lance assistant Martijn Leeftink.

*Promotion Dutch Higher Education: MENA Scholarship Programme information evenings and lectures at the NIASD (20-21 January 2008)*

In the evenings of the 20th and 21st of January 2008, the NIASD organized information evenings and lectures at the institute about the new MENA Scholarship Programme that was launched by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This programme provides scholarships for Syrian mid-career professionals for short courses at four educational institutes in The Netherlands. On both evenings NIASD deputy director Taco van der Zwaag gave introductions to the scholarship programme, covering disciplines, course



providers, eligibility criteria and the application and selection procedure. In addition, the NIASD arranged for a presentation by Ms. Mieke van Riet of the Maastricht School of Management (MSM) on the 20th of January 2008, highlighting specific courses at MSM as well as the MSM training methodology (see picture on the left). On the 21st of January 2008, dr. Jan Willem Foppen of

UNESCO-IHE in Delft introduced courses at UNESCO-IHE and delivered a specific presentation about 'Little Bugs in Groundwater'. Meanwhile, in another room of the NIASD, dr. Abbas Farshad introduced the International Institute for Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC) in Enschede and talked about 'Geo-Information for Desertification'. The number of applications submitted to the Dutch Embassy before the deadline of the 15th of March 2008 was very satisfying and much higher than expected.

*Study trips Syrian students International Relations and Diplomacy to Holland (11-20 January 2008) and Dutch students Political Science to Syria (23 Jan. - 3 Feb. 2008)*

The NIASD supported the organization of two study trips which took place on the basis of the Memorandum of Understanding concluded between the University of Amsterdam and Kalamoon University in Syria on the 18th of July 2007.



*Syrian and Dutch students during student paper presentations at the University of Amsterdam*

Thirteen Syrian students and two instructors of the Faculty of International Relations and Diplomacy of Kalamoon University went to The Netherlands (and Brussels) between the 11th and the 20th of January 2008.

They visited, and met representatives of, various organizations, including the new public library of Amsterdam, the Dutch gay and lesbian ngo COC, the University of Amsterdam (where prof.dr. Gerd Junne introduced the Political Science department, dr. Hein-Anton van der Heijden gave a lecture about civil society in The Netherlands, and Mr. Marcel Maussen on Muslim Minorities in France and The Netherlands), the Our Lord in the Attic museum (where dr. Thijl Sunier gave a lecture about the relationships between religious institutions and the state), the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (where prof.dr. Maurits Berger of the Clingendael institute and Leiden University spoke about relations between Arabs and the West in their political, psychological and emotional dimensions, and where the students met with Mr. Peter van der Bloemen, responsible for Lebanon and Syria at



*Mr. Peter van der Bloemen with Syrian and Dutch students at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

the Middle East desk of the Ministry), the International Court of Justice, the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education in Delft, the polling institute Interview/NSS and the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) in Amsterdam, as well as the European Parliament and European Commission in Brussels.

The Syrian students were also welcomed in the house of a former Ambassador to Syria, Mr. G. Meihuizen and his wife, Dr. Tomador Meihuizen Hassoun, president of the Arab-Dutch Women Association.

On the 23rd of January 2008 a group of 15 Dutch students and 2 teachers of the Political Science Department of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences of the University of Amsterdam arrived in Syria. At the Kalamoon University, dr. Khaled Al-Masri, the vice-dean of the Faculty of International Relations and Diplomacy, delivered a lecture about Syrian foreign policy within its regional and international settings.



The Dutch students visited many organizations and cultural sites, including the museum of Deir Atiyah, the Monastery of Saint Jacob in Qara, the projects of Father Frans van der Lugt in Al-Qseir, and the NIASD where on Saturday the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 2007 dr. Marwan Kabalan of Damascus University (*see on the left, above*) delivered a lecture on the situation in Iraq and dr. Ibrahim Darajee of Kalamoon University (*see left, below*) on the Hariri Tribunal.

At Kalamoon University students discussed papers, and prof.dr. S. Moubayed gave a lecture about the history of the Syrian press. Other organizations which the Dutch group visited included the International Organization for Migration (IMO), the UNHCR, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (where H.E. the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour, dr. Diala Hay Aref, welcomed the students), the Syrian Parliament, the newspaper Al Watan, the Orient Centre for Studies, the Syrian Virtual University, the Dutch Embassy, the public relations centre of the Golan Heights and the Islamic Civilization Society.

*Pottery Lectures and Workshop (2-6 March 2008)*

Together with the Department of Archaeology of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Damascus University, the NIASD facilitated 2 lectures by dr. Olivier Nieuwenhuys (*see on the right*) of the Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, titled "The earliest Pottery in Syria: new discoveries" (5th



of March 2008) and “The ‘Painted Pottery Revolution’ and the Origins of the Halaf Culture”(6th of March 2008). Both these lectures took place at the Department of Archaeology of Damascus University.

Furthermore, dr. Olivier Nieuwenhuys, dr. Bram van As and mr. Loe Jacobs of Leiden University delivered a workshop about “Archaeological Technological Pottery Research” for 11 master students and 5 bachelor students of the Department of Archaeology of Damascus University. The workshop took place from the 2nd to the 6th of March 2008, both at Damascus University and at the NIASD



*Mr. Loe Jacobs during the pottery workshop*

#### *Round table discussion on Hydrology and Water Resources (22 April 2008)*



Upon the request of the American Cultural Center in Damascus, the NIASD hosted a round table discussion in the afternoon of the 22nd of April, 2008. A group of Syrian geologists, hydrologists, environmentalists and water scientists discussed

various issues concerning hydrology and water resources with climate scientist dr. Brenda Ekwurzel of the Union of Concerned Scientists.



#### *MSM Training Course on Project Development and Management*

The Danish Institute in Damascus and the NIASD succeeded in attracting enough funds to execute their project proposal concerning the development and delivery of a training course on project development and management. In March 2008 the NIASD concluded a contract with the Maastricht School of Management (MSM) who will deliver the course at the Danish Institute and at the NIASD in Damascus, starting in July 2008. The course is divided in seven sessions spread over a time period of about one year, the last session is scheduled for August 2009.

### *Two new interns at the NIASD (February – April 2008)*

On the 1st of February 2008 the NIASD welcomed Ms. Noral Stel as a new intern at the institute. Nora finished her Bachelor in History at Radboud University in Nijmegen and wanted to gain some practical work experience abroad, before continuing with a master study programme. Amongst other things, Nora helped the institute with the organization of the institute's film programme 2008, its summer course Arabic 2008 and with an event on water management which we hope to bring later this year. She will stay at the institute until the 15th of June 2008. The second intern of 2008, Annemijn van den Broek, arrived on the 21st of April 2008 and will stay until half July 2008. Annemijn has a Bachelor in Language and Culture and a Master in History of Utrecht University, and specialized in the history of international relations. Annemijn will assist the NIASD in organizing its activities.

### *Courses Dutch (21 January – 20 May 2008)*

On the 21<sup>st</sup> and the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2008 two beginners' courses of Dutch started with in total 13 students. These courses ran until the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2008. An intermediate



*Teacher G. Barkoudah with some Dutch language students*

course with 5 students was delivered from the 18<sup>th</sup> of March to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2008. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 2008 another beginners' course started with 12 students and will run until the 20<sup>th</sup> of May.

## **4. Culture**

### *Dutch Film Week in Homs (5-9 January 2008)*

After ten years the Cinema Club of the city of Homs (160 kilometer north of Damascus) was brought back to live again, notably with a Dutch Film Week which was organized in co-operation with the NIASD. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 2008, NIASD deputy director Taco van der Zwaag opened this film week, which attracted about 150 visitors each evening. Five Dutch movies were screened with Arabic subtitles: *Langer Licht* (Northern Light), *De Poolse Bruid* (The Polish Bride), *Hollandse Licht* (Dutch Light), *De Zee die Denkt* (The Sea That Thinks) and *Schnitzelparadijs* (Schnitzel Paradise). The film week took place at a local cultural centre in Homs.



*NIASD Filmprogramma 2008: 'Kicks', 'Polleke' and 'I am Mohammed' screened at the institute (11-13 March 2008)*

From the 11th until the 13th of March 2008 the NIASD screened two Dutch feature films and one Dutch documentary (*Kicks, Polleke, Ik ben Mohammed*) with Arabic subtitles. These three films were programmed under the title "Youth and Cultural Diversity". The films were each screened twice, either at 17:00h or at 20:00h. In between the screenings there were introductions and analyses (by Mr. Haval Amin on the 11th of March and by Mr. Orwa Nyrabia on the 12th of March 2008) and discussions. On Thursday the 13th of March the institute organized a one hour interactive reflection on the themes of the three films with Syrian and Dutch students. Syrian dancer Eyas Al-Mokdad and Syrian painter Ahmad Osso gave artistic interpretations during that event, parts of which were recorded and broadcasted by Syrian national television as well.



*Discussion with Syrian and Dutch students about the three films*



*Dancer Eyas Al-Mokdad and painter Ahmad Osso at work*

*Workshop New Media Art Installations, by Dutch artists Anita Mizrahi and Maarten Rens at the Faculty of Fine Arts of Damascus University (20-28 April 2008)*

Dutch visual artists Anita Mizrahi and Maarten Rens from Amsterdam delivered a workshop about new media art installations for Syrian art students at the Faculty of Fine Arts of Damascus University between the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> of April 2008. In this practical



workshop, students learned to work with digital photo and video cameras and to process their material on computers. Maarten and Anita challenged and encouraged the students to go outside to take pictures, shoot film and conduct interviews, and to create works of art out of that. At the end of the workshop, a group exhibition with the students' works was opened at the faculty.

## **5. Co-operation**

### *Contacts with Syrian-Dutch Water Cooperation project renewed (January-April 2008)*

During the first few months of 2008 the NIASD refreshed its existing contacts with the representatives of the Syrian-Dutch Water Cooperation project, which led to talks with Mr. Gerard de Vries and Mr. Wael Seif on the 6th and 25th of February on possibilities for cooperation in the fall of this year.

### *Consultants accommodated*

In the month of April, the NIASD accommodated Mr. Lex Takkenberg of UNHCR in the institute for a few days.