

**Word of welcome by Professor Carel Stolker, Rector Magnificus and President,
Leiden University
8 November 2017**

Dear friends,

I would like to welcome Sir Colin Blakemore (President of the World Cultural Council), laureates, Excellencies, colleagues, students and other guests.

As President of Leiden University, I am very proud that the World Cultural Council has chosen our University as the venue for its award ceremony. This Peter's Church is the place where the university was founded on the 8th of February 1975.

The World Cultural Council is an international organization, founded in 1981 on the initiative of Mexican educator and visionary maestro Rafael Estrada to promote culture, values and goodwill throughout the world.

It was founded with the initial collaboration of no fewer than 124 top scientists and personalities from all parts of the globe. And every year it holds an award ceremony in a different country, honoring exceptional scientists and scholars who have carried out outstanding work in Science and Scholarship, Education or the Arts. And for me personally, is it a pleasure to be able to participate in this important event.

Two weeks ago I visited Mexico to expand collaboration with universities and science-funding bodies there. I trust that this Award Ceremony, too, will serve to strengthen bonds between our university and Latin America as a whole.

It is a particular privilege for us to receive these eminent award winners, all of whom have made exceptional achievements in science and the arts and whose work has had a significant positive impact on the cultural legacy of mankind. Two accomplished individuals will be honored this year, Professor Yaghi and Professor Hartenberger. And we are delighted to have them here in our midst.

I am also extremely pleased that nine of our younger scholars - all women - will receive a special recognition as part of this award ceremony. They have performed outstandingly in their respective fields and represent some of the promising early-career researchers in the Netherlands as well as internationally.

At Leiden, we firmly believe in the importance of recognizing, encouraging and giving visibility to these young scholars whose groundbreaking research has a significant impact on society. These researchers are also special in that they are all highly skilled in communicating about their research, both with the academic world and with the general public.

There can be no question that more *women* should be encouraged in their academic careers. It is therefore no coincidence that in this Westerdijk year - Joanna Westerdijk was the first

female professor in the Netherlands - the nine special awards being presented today all go to some of the most talented women at our University.

Dear friends, this Peter's Church is a fitting setting for recognizing the outstanding achievements of the award winners and celebrating the inspiration that they bring as role models for encouraging a fairer society.

I would like to mention one such award presented to an exceptional individual scientist. In 2015, one of our professors, Ewine van Dishoeck, an expert in Molecular Astrophysics, was selected for the Albert Einstein World Award of Science, for her contribution to understanding the universe at atomic level. An individual award that has inspired many young female researchers.

I wish you all an enjoyable and stimulating afternoon, and I now invite Professor Van Dishoeck, master of ceremonies for today, to take the floor.