

Marjan Schwegman, director of the NIOD

Inauguration speech exhibition "***Lawyers without rights - The fate of Jewish Lawyers in Germany after 1933***"

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Welcome. Special welcome to Mr. Willem Bekkers, president of the Netherlands Bar Association, Dr. Westenberger, vice-president of the Bundesrechtsanwaltskammer, Mr. Geiron, president of the Israel Bar Association, Mr. Els Swaab, lawyer in Amsterdam and chair of the National Committee 4 and 5 May.

Right from the foundation of the RIOD (the predecessor of the NIOD), research has been done about juridical aspects of the German occupation of the Netherlands and its aftermath. In the fifties publications of the trials of Dutch and German war criminals drew a lot of public attention. Later, Gerrold van der Stroom, Nanno in 't Veld, Geraldien von Freitag, Gerard Aalders and Peter Romijn wrote monographs, to name some of the NIOD researchers engaged in the topic of the long lasting impact of the German occupation on the Dutch legal system. In all those cases the initiative for research projects came from the Dutch. The trajectory leading to the exhibition we are inaugurating today is different, though. In this case it has been an exhibition in Germany, based on research about German Lawyers after 1933, that has stimulated the Netherlands Bar Association to contact the NIOD in order to map out the possibilities of a research project about Dutch Lawyers under German occupation. The result has been twofold:

1. the exhibition of today: part of the original German exhibition with some additional authentic Dutch material.
2. Since 2006 The Netherlands Bar Association is funding an independent research project of the NIOD, source for the Dutch part of this exhibition.

Ad 2. Dr. Joggli Meihuizen is engaged in this research project that analyses the position and functioning of the Dutch legal profession under German occupation. He also reconstructs, as much as possible, the histories of individual lawyers. Of special interest is, of course, the fate of Jewish lawyers. How was it possible that the ethics of the Dutch legal system did not prevent Dutch lawyers from looking the other side when their Jewish colleagues were humiliated and eventually destroyed? Although the Dutch like to think that Dutch lawyers have been more considerate towards their Jewish colleagues than the German, the president of the Netherlands Bar Association, Willem Bekkers, said in a recent interview that he doubts whether this is a truthful picture. In 2010, when Joggli Meihuizen will publish the result of his research, we will know more. Meihuizen is an expert when it comes to carefully analyzing the role of representatives of the Dutch elite during and after German occupation. His doctoral thesis is dedicated to the post war punishment of Dutch economical collaborators. As has been the case with Dutch lawyers until 2006, the role of Dutch captains of industry had been neglected in historical research, probably

because their history is a source of shame, since their contribution to the economical collaboration has been considerably more extensive than was known before Meihuizen published his thesis.

When it comes to the writing of and the coping with shameful histories, Germany is a specialist, more than the Netherlands. In fact, I think that in this respect there is a lot to learn from our German neighbours. Therefore I consider this a happy occasion for further international collaboration. In the future I expect it to be less and less important who takes the lead, or who follows who, as long as the questions unite and enthuse researchers from different countries. For now I would like to thank the Netherlands Bar Association for wishing to know about a past that, however dark it may be, is a source of inspiration for the present. More than ever before since the end of the German occupation, the ethics of the Dutch legal system are under pressure because of the so called war against terrorism. Although the past does not repeat itself in a mathematically predictable way, it still is important to know what have been the dilemma's of other times. The NIOD is looking forward to Joggi Meihuizen's book that will see the light in 2010. A good time to meet again, which you can consider a promise.