May I first thank you for inviting me to speak and apologise to you all for speaking in English. It is an honour and a privilege to convey thoughts on behalf of colleagues at AIGHD - the Amsterdam Institute for Global Health and Development and the newly forming AHTI – the Amsterdam Health and Technology Institute.

Before I do this, the families of Jacqueline van Tongeren and Joep Lange have asked me to pass on to you their gratitude for all the sympathy and support they have received. People have emphasized to them how caring and committed Joep and Jacqueline were. The families want us to know that they laid the foundation, but that there is still much work left to be done by us, their colleagues, and “new” Jacquelines and Joeps.

So, who were they?

Jacqueline van Tongeren was Director of Communications at AIGHD. The office we shared was a communications hub not only for professional matters but also for personal concerns of staff. As her friend Han Nefkens of ArtAids recalls: “Jacqueline’s first impulse was always to put aside her own needs for those of others, asking how can I help where I am needed? She had great intuition, she always sensed exactly what was going on, and she knew how to create harmony in her own delicate way.” In our office, she was constantly sought out for advice and was always willing to help and to share experiences. Her emotional intelligence was such an invaluable asset for us, both internally and in relation to our partners.

She had many facets. She headed up the special AIDS ward when it was established at AMC to take care of AIDS patients. Her family sent me a copy of the application letter that she wrote to AMC in response to a newspaper advertisement 25 years ago. In the early 1990s, when the first anti-HIV drugs became available for clinical testing, she began working with Joep Lange as a research nurse, coordinating NATEC – the National AIDS Therapy Evaluation Center. Her smooth and efficient organisational skills were key to the Netherlands becoming a renowned clinical research hub for multi-site and multi-country clinical studies of novel and badly needed drugs. She helped set up many other initiatives, including IATEC, the International Antiviral Therapy Evaluation Center, the annual INTEREST Workshop that showcases state-of-the-art African HIV prevention and treatment science, and CPOD - the Center for Poverty-related and Communicable Diseases, that eventually became the Amsterdam Institute for Global Health and Development.

Jacqueline had been actively planning her semi-retirement for the end of this year, continuing her work with the INTEREST Workshop – it has been called the African “CROI”, after the HIV scientific conference...
of that name held annually in North America. You may not know that she had an art gallery in the 1970s and 1980s in Amsterdam and she dreamed of having one again when she retired. She was a loving daughter, sister, and aunt, helping care for her mother so that she could stay at home after Jacqueline’s father died. She loved art, ballet, theatre, and music and she had many friends in Amsterdam’s artistic world. She had devoted a considerable amount of her time to campaigns to preserve heritage sites in Amsterdam, including, for example, the refurbishment that she helped design of the Dutch West India House. She was renowned for having superb taste and could always be counted on to provide advice on how to do things with grace and style while being true to the content and objectives of an event. So many people have written or talked to us about her, from all walks of life.

What about Joep Lange? Joep Lange was a visionary, a catalyser, and a thought leader. Not only did he run clinical trials to test the first antiretroviral drugs, he advocated strongly and repeatedly for access to antiretroviral therapy for people living with HIV in resource-constrained settings. At a time when everyone said it could not be done, he worked with Dutch private sector companies that were running businesses in Africa, starting with Heineken. I must admit that when I learned about this at a 2002 meeting that he convened in Noordweg, I decided that Heineken was the only beer I would drink from then on. He provided the companies with convincing arguments about the rationale for treating African employees with HIV disease and the technical assistance to do it.

He did many other things, but he did not abandon HIV research. When he left us, he was setting up two flagship studies: NOVA, a functional cure study here in the Netherlands to see how drug treatment immediately after HIV infection can stop the virus from seeding reservoirs and a treatment implementation study in rural Tanzanian clinics with little infrastructure.

He was a mentor and a coach for many students. He was the promotor for 40 PhD students who completed their doctorates on a variety of topics and had 15 currently active PhD students when he died. I was one of the lucky ones to have him as a promoter. He was so supportive and encouraging and he forced me to get the ‘UN-ese’ - international civil servant talk - out of my academic work.

What kind of person was he? Joep was kind and caring but he did not suffer fools gladly - an attack from him could be searing. He was so committed and he had a highly attuned detector of insincerity, self-aggrandisement, or self-serving behaviour – he would avoid such people like the plague if he could.

He wanted to get things done well and quickly whenever possible and he did everything he could to create the conditions for that, supporting people who were committed to getting the right things done efficiently. As one of his PhD students Harriet Manyanja-Kizza wrote: “Joep – he was gentle, simple, a doer, results-oriented. He had ideas, made plans, did the thinking, then gently worked with those he selected to implement the ideas – then he took a back seat, so half the time one may not even know he was the architect of the idea, plan or program. “This sums him up beautifully.

Not only has the AIDS world globally lost these two key people, we have lost them too in our academic world, in our HIV world, and as colleagues and friends. And we must not forget the sorrowing families. It is incomprehensible that people who worked so hard to save the lives of others should be shot down and be collateral damage in someone else’s war. Each of us needs to reflect on how to celebrate their memories by taking forward their visions. This world is a better place for them having walked among us. Let this be said of each of us too.

Thank you all for coming today.