

## **Toespraak Peter de Ruijter, voorzitter COC Amsterdam, bij overhandiging Amsterdam Rainbow Dress aan Amsterdam Museum**

Dear all, dear people, dear newcomers,

thank you for the opportunity to gather here today in this beautiful setting at the Amsterdam Museum and speak a few words about this magnificent project, the Amsterdam Rainbow Dress.

During last year's COC's Shakespeare Club the 76 or so flags that make up the Dress that we see here today, were donated generously by the organisers of the Pride Walk.

On contemplating what we, the 4 initiators of the project and volunteers of COC Amsterdam could do with the flags, the idea of a huge dress quickly manifested itself. Striking obviously in visual impact, but also filled with rich potential meaning.

From the perspective of COC Amsterdam, being a local, community driven organisation I asked myself the question what meaning 76 or so flags of countries sometimes very far away, sometimes closer by, could have for the LGBTI community in Amsterdam, and for that matter 'local' LGBTI communities elsewhere.

Of course there is the question of basic Human Rights in those countries and I am hoping that the Dress will inspire national and international governments and NGO's to keep on pressing for improvements on this.

But what does this Dress mean for Amsterdam? Almost as a flip side of the same coin, how can the Dress activate and empower YOU, and the local LGBTI community?

For me the Dress signifies that you are here, that you matter, and asks for your engagement and the engagement of the local community and institutions including the municipality to ensure that you have a place in our Cities and communities, to ensure that you are treated and 'seen' as a person, to ensure that you are swiftly assisted to set-up a new life in Amsterdam and The Netherlands. Yes, that requires joint commitment from you, the local community and our institutions. This is what the Dress stands for in my view, this continuum of 'far away' and very 'local', very near.

The next step, the donation and the start of a new Foundation with the aim of spreading this message clearly signifies the potential of this project. Let's take this 'local' part of the rich meaning of the Amsterdam Rainbow Dress at heart and act on it.

Thank you very much.