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Alumnus of the Year 2022: jury report

The University of Groningen is proud of its alumni. They are our ambassadors and our links to society. Every year, we award one of our alumni the title Alumnus of the Year, as an expression of appreciation and encouragement. The title is awarded to a UG alumnus who, in our eyes, has made an extraordinary contribution to society, academia or culture, is a source of inspiration for others and shows promise for the future.

The Alumnus of the Year 2022 is Iris de Graaf, Russia correspondent for the NOS.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has once again demonstrated the importance of independent journalists, who know the facts, give clarity to developments, separate the wheat from the chaff, and allow a variety of perspectives to be heard. Iris de Graaf is this sort of journalist. She reports for the national Dutch broadcaster NOS on and from a country that is acting as the aggressor in a devastating war in Europe. A war that, until recently, we had considered to be impossible.

In addition to reporting—including live reporting—for television, radio, and online platforms, Iris de Graaf writes background articles for the NOS. She is also a columnist for regional newspapers *Dagblad van het Noorden* and *Leeuwarder Courant*, among others.

Her reporting is sharp and well-informed, with clear analyses, as well as an eye to the people involved. When she began in her role as Russia correspondent two years ago, her intention was to portray the human aspect of Russia and not only to report on political developments. To give people who wouldn't otherwise be heard a voice. And, although events took a completely different turn with the invasion of Ukraine, this remains her core intention.

At the same time, she shows how complex it is for a journalist to work in a country in which freedom is under pressure. Where facts are pushed aside for propaganda, and where it can be fatal to speak out both for journalists and citizens. She even had to leave Russia herself for some time, but she has since returned to see whether it is indeed possible to continue reporting.

Over the past few months, her reporting has helped the Dutch population to better understand the developments in Russia and Ukraine and to gain insight into the war. She does this without being too one-sided, as a coincidental passer-by recently complimented her, but by providing space for the Russian perspective as well, even if this is sometimes less valued in the Netherlands.

The values to which she subscribes as a reporter are also important to us as a University: developing expertise, being curious, attempting to uncover the truth, being critical, acting

responsibly, and being engaged with one another and with society. Open debate, the exchange of opposing opinions, and listening to one another go hand-in-hand with these values. We share these values with our students in turn, who spread out across the globe after graduating. For them, Iris de Graaf is certainly a source of inspiration, a deserved Alumnus of the Year.

About Iris de Graaf

Iris de Graaf (1991) studied Slavonic Languages and Russian Studies in Groningen from 2009 to 2014. Thereafter she obtained a Master's degree in Journalism, at the time when journalist Jeroen Smit—Alumnus of the Year in 2009—was professor. Her thesis was on the reporting of the MH17 disaster. She maintained a blog on fashion and lifestyle, and went on to report for the NOS on youth culture.

Thanks to her knowledge of Russia and the Russian language, she was appointed to the NOS' foreign affairs desk, leading to her correspondentship in Russia in 2020. She can be heard and seen on news broadcasts including for the *Achtuurjournaal*, the *Jeugdjournaal*, the *Radio 1 Journaal*, and *Nieuwsuur*.

The jury

This year, the jury for the Alumnus of the Year award comprised:

Cisca Wijmenga, Rector Magnificus, chair

Laurien Meuter, founder Tiny Miracles Foundation, Alumnus of the Year 2020

Wilbert Kolkman, Dean of the Faculty of Law

Remco Kouwenhoven, Director of Alumni Relations & Fundraising/Ubbo Emmius Fund

Previous winners

2020 - Laurien Meuter (1976), founder Tiny Miracles Foundation, economics

2019 - Sander de Hosson (1977), pulmonary specialist and pioneer of good palliative care; Medicine

2018 - Christiaan Triebert (1991), visual investigative journalist for the New York Times/Bellingcat; IRIO

2017 - Carolien de Bruin (1977), founder of C-Change, which helps international companies and organizations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals; Business and Finance

2016 - Merel Rumping (1984), founder of Carewithinreach, making orthopaedic care accessible to all; IRIO

2015 - Luuk van Middelaar (1973), writer, professor and expert on Europe; History/Philosophy

2014 - Monica Arac de Nyeko (1979), Ugandan writer and humanitarian specialist for UNICEF, one of the writers on the Africa39 list and winner of the 2007 Caine Prize for a short story about two lesbian teenagers that served as the inspiration for the film *Rafiki*; Humanitarian Assistance

2013 - Wim Pijbes (1961), former Director of the Rijksmuseum; Art History

2012 - Matthijs Bierman (1964), Director of Triodos Bank; Business Administration and Law

2011 - Stine Jensen (1972), philosopher, writer, programme maker; Philosophy

2010 - Jelle Brandt Corstius (1978), writer, programme maker; History