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**Stageverslag: Jan Jaap van Halem: internship at the Dutch Embassy to the United Nations, New York**  
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**Citation**

Halem, J. J. van. (2003). Stageverslag: Jan Jaap van Halem: internship at the Dutch Embassy to the United Nations, New York. *Bestuurskundige Berichten*, 18(5), 38-39. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3211183>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

## Stageverslag: Jan Jaap van Halem

Internship at the Dutch Embassy to the United Nations, New York

*From the 10<sup>th</sup> of January to the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2003, I was an intern at the Dutch Permanent Representation to the United Nations in New York as part of my Graduate Degree. A personal note is annoying to most, but I want to dedicate the few words you will find below to the people behind the daily laughers at the mission*

First and utmost the diplomats at the Permanent Representation or 'mission' are bureaucrats at a Dutch ministry. They serve their minister and are confronted with a large organization in which they have to function. Secondly they are diplomats working in the Foreign Service. In the classic sense, they 'represent their king'. They work with a very limited discretionary space and are tightly monitored by their superiors in The Hague when it comes to what is being said. The timing of and way in which things are presented are the essence of diplomacy and proof the talent of the diplomats. The diplomats at the Permanent Representation in New York made it to the most wanted mission of the whole ministry, and this high competition assured the mission of very capable personal. I found the group cohesion impeccable and this is in my opinion largely due to awareness of the circumstances the diplomats were confronted with both from the 'home front' in The Hague and the position of their mission in New York, which brings me to my final point. The Dutch diplomats seemed to be highly esteemed by both the UN-family and the other missions in New York. The Dutch bring with them a large pile of money and seem to get a long with the idealistic larger donors, more pragmatic powers and the developing countries. All this adds up to an atmosphere where the diplomats showed up happy at work, facing daily problems, but dealing with all of them with a lot of trust, confidence and - very important - fun.

Valuing administrative staff, royal visitors, colleagues at UN meetings and interns for what they were worth, the diplomats seemed to aim at a 'professional organization' as Mintzberg would call it. Capacities are the determining factor in the mission, not structure or hierarchy. In my

impression this has led to a team of very self-reliant and at the same time collegial diplomats.

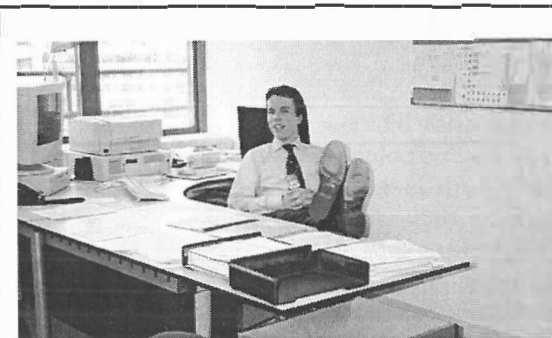
An all-consuming topic for the mission during my stay was the upcoming Dutch presidency of the EU in the second part of 2004. In an increasing number of topics the EU speaks as one to the UN. Depending on the mandate, the Commission or the Council speaks on behalf of the EU member states. Where there is no mandate the EU countries coordinate their position as much as possible. From July 2004 the Dutch mission will be in charge of all EU coordination for six months during the Dutch Presidency. Not only the always extremely busy General Assembly of the UN will take up most of the time, but also for the first time EU coordination will need to take place with the enlarged EU.

The main duty of interns is to make reports of the many meetings that are being held at the United Nations head quarter in New York. The permanent staff of the mission can only visit as many meetings as they have staff for and often the ministry in The Hague is interested in a wider range of topics. When I heard that I could start at the mission beginning January 2003 I had ten working days and the holidays left to organize myself. Only 18 hours before I landed at JFK I handed in my last papers at University and the day before I assured my successor, as student-assistant, knew what the Dean of our Faculty expected of her. Some 5 hours after boarding the USI drank my first beers in the Meatpacking District. Forty-eight hours later I had had my first day at work and we sat front row at a Broadway show where I realized that our table was better than the one

Brad Pitt and his company arranged that day across the boardwalk.

The first four weeks in New York I more or less functioned on my autopilot. I was assigned to the Economic and Social Section of the mission. In the coming four months I would visit meetings in the full range of topics that my section covered. Reporting to The Hague on the United Nations Forum on Forests on the day the Security Council saw the end of diplomacy on the Iraq crises was for me the most notorious one. The amount of dossiers I saw passing by gave me the chance to get an impression of the broad scope of work of the UN-family. There was always enough to do.

I got the chance to learn about the relation between the UN Funds and Programs and their donors. The main donor countries of the UN function as the stakeholders of those agencies. The UN is being held accountable to them during Executive Boards. As one of the largest contributors to the UN, our mission seemed to be behaving like a larger shareholder. There are mainly two ways our mission and the ministry in The Hague try to influence the Funds and Programs. There are the official meetings in which both the EU (and in cases where no consensus is reached within the EU the Netherlands directly) can make statements. It is up to the Board of the respective agency to find common positions in all these statements and to use them to formulate a new policy plan that everybody can find themselves in. Informal meetings between the Funds and Programs and their 'shareholders' are frequently held to get information first hand and more direct. The better the agencies are aware



Jan Jaap op zijn stageplek in New York

of the wishes and demands of the donors, the better chance they have to appease them and duly keep the flow of funding coming in.

My task during the numerous Executive Boards was to assist the Dutch team consisting of the delegation from The Hague and the Permanent Representative in New York. Since in the weeks of the Executive Boards the two processes described above were happening at the same time, I usually followed the official sessions where the statements were made, while the diplomats were holding consultations with other member states and the representatives of the Funds and Programs. The Dutch mission also chaired the Humanitarian Liaison Working Group, an informal group of Permanent Representatives involved in humanitarian affairs that several times I assisted by writing parts of the reports on those meetings.

In an ad hoc working group UN reforms were discussed. The formal meetings accounted for the decisions about the approach, the progress and next steps towards a concluding text. In the informal meetings three blocks and some non-aligned countries discussed the possibilities. The G77 represented by Morocco, the US and the EU where the main actors. Simply said, everybody agreed on the need to reform, but the G77 wanted more means of implementation - money - and the EU and US did not, since the burden would be on their side. The country that held the presidency, Greece, headed the EU

coordination meetings and presented 'our' case to the others.

Both the G77 and the EU presented common positions that were compromises of a set of positions. The set of compromised compromises needed to be compromised once again during the 'informal' UN meetings. To get somewhere near the objectives each of the actors in the UN informal meetings needed to present a clear-cut fighting paper, that could lead to an acceptable compromise. In the end the groups informally seemed to agree to prevent damage to the follow-up process by not adding new follow-up processes. It showed me a lot about the prioritizing within our mission, the game of negotiation within the EU and the trench-like diplomacy in the social-economic field, resulting from the one country-one vote approach in the General Assembly, to which the Working Group belonged. Luckily I also got some jobs to do more appropriate for an intern, in the American meaning of the word. There was a fine set of data I collected in order to explain that for example on liposuction by men in the US, more money was spent than by the whole UN family, which budget more approached that of New York 'bravest', the fire fighters. I was also made - partially - responsible for the cheese and grapes at a reception the Prince of Orange visited.

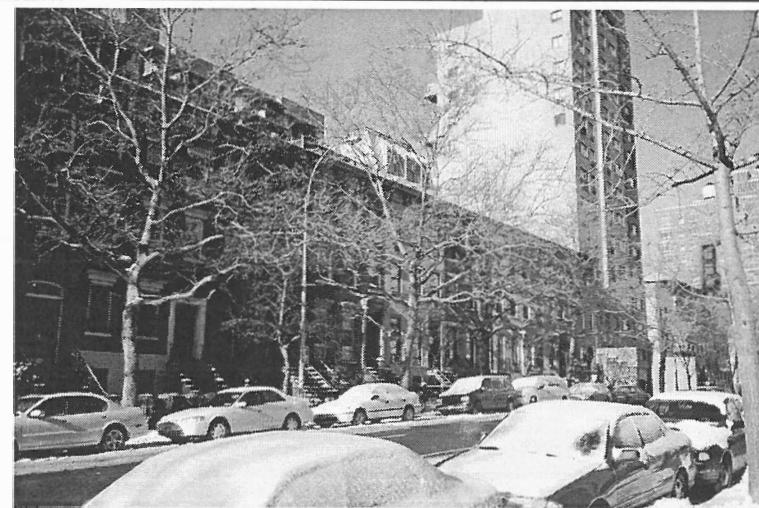
### Lessons learned

My duty was to listen, summarize and analyze political viewpoints of my

counterparts, in order to inform The Hague in a couple of sentences about meetings that lasted for hours. Most important for me was to know what The Hague was interested in, what common knowledge was that they were not interested in and what new, surprising information was presented. Through listening and listening I got the impression that by observing the diplomats a lot of information about the relevance of what was said, could be abstracted. In the end the knowledge about the dossiers still is the most important factor contributing to successful reporting. And more than that, most things on the daily schedule of the UN do not bring about new information, but reaffirm what countries agree on. This relatively boring focus on common agreements is perhaps the crux of the United Nations. 'Slow down you move to fast, you've got to make the moment last,' sang Simon and Garfunkel. This slogan described precisely the feeling I had in New York. The unique opportunity I got to be an intern at the Dutch mission to the UN head quarter is something fantastic. The coincidence that the UN have their head quarters in New York made it possible to say that I 'lived the dream' earlier in my life that I had ever expected. With my fellow interns we took the opportunity to discover the bars and restaurants in all parts of Manhattan, play soccer in Central Park with a bunch of Dutch expatriates and just strolled through a city that felt like home in a matter of days. New York is a city of proud, hard working people, who get nothing for free, but the life of a New Yorker.

It is not easy settling for less once you have seen what is possible in life. In that sense an experience as this does not make the life of a young student easy. The pressure from yourself and others after an internship in New York is easily weight up to though, by even the daily hang-over run from Washington Square, University Plaza, Union Square, through the Subway to Grand Central, Lexington Avenue and than 45<sup>th</sup> street, where a great bunch of the happy few were also dying for their cups of coffee. □

Jan Jaap van Halem



New York in de winter