

## Visit report 06/10/2016: United Nations Building

By: Bart van de Pol

The headquarters of the United Nations is in New York City. The headquarters is located in the Turtle Bay overlooking the East River. We were greeted by Werner Schmidt, who is a public information officer of the UN. He has been with the UN for over 20 years and was a former German consulate. He has worked very closely with the German ambassador before joining the UN in New York. He gave us a lot of information of the building during a tour throughout the building. Werner told us the UN building was designed by Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer and French architect Le Corbusier. The UN building consists of four buildings: General Assembly Building, the Conference building, the Secretariat and the Library. In 2008 the UN building was renovated and several changes to the building were made in order to ensure that the building is safe and secure.

### Construction of the UN building

The United Nations had three headquarters before in New York. These were in Geneva (1946), Vienna (1980) and Nairobi (1996). Werner told us that the UN was first assigned to a location in Queens, but the UN did not accept that location. The land where the UN building now stands was originally owned by real estate developer William Zeckendorf. Nelson Rockefeller arranged it so that the current location of the building was sold back then for 8.5 million dollars, which translates to around 100 million dollars now. Zeckendorf was willing to comply with the sale since Zeckendorf was a rival of Rockefeller and tried to create the new Rockefeller Center. The designs of Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer were combined as to be the final design of the UN building. The building was built in four years between 1948-1952. Before the renovation the air conditioning could not keep the temperature of the building constant during hot days. This was due to the fact that the air conditioning system was made and designed with techniques from the 1940's. In order to keep the temperature low of the building. The building was cooled down overnight, which meant that a meeting in the morning could only be tolerable with a coat.

Werner told us also that government buildings in that period of time were used to intimidate people. The UN wanted to be open and not intimidate anyone. That message comes back in the design of the building. Especially in the lobby, where the high windows and open hallways make the building look longer and bigger. The architects made sure to cooperate the idea that the UN building was open for everyone in the entire world showing transparency and openness in the design.

### Renovation of the UN building

In 2008 renovation was done on the UN building. There were several reasons for the renovation, one of reasons was that large amount of asbestos materials needed to be remove in the building. Werner told us that in total an entire football field with a width of 5 meters of asbestos materials was collected from the UN building. Another reason was that UN building was not secure enough for potential attacks. For example, Werner stated that during the renovation the windows were strengthened in order to prevent blasts and sacrifice rooms were constructed under the security council chamber. These sacrifice rooms can be collapsed if an explosion will occur from the highway below. Finally, safety officials from New York identified a total of 807 violations of the safety standard from New York. With the building renovated to prevent potential attacks and constructed according to the safety standards. The UN building will be safe enough to be open for the public for another 100 years.