

Japan - Netherlands Peace Exchange Program 10th anniversary reunion

15 July 2015

Ms. Van Miltenburg (President of the House of Representatives),
Mr. Jacobs, (Former Ambassador to Japan, Representing the Dutch
Ministry of Foreign Affairs today)

Mr. van Nouhuys, (Former Ambassador to Japan)

Mr. van Poelgeest (Deputy Secretary General for General Affairs),

Mr. van Bodegom,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentleman,

Let me first express my sincere gratitude for your attendance today.

I am glad that we can celebrate the 10th anniversary of the “Japan -
Netherlands Peace Exchange Program” with so many participants from
the past 10 years.

Before I go into my speech today, let me touch upon a tragic incident
that happened one year ago.

This week also brings us the one year commemoration of the MH17
crash on July 17 of last year.

My sympathy goes out especially to the many Dutch families that were
impacted severely by this tragic event.

I pray for comfort and peace for the all people involved.

Going back to the reason of our gathering here today, I would like to
start with a familiar fact to you all, which is the longstanding
relationship between the Netherlands and Japan for over 400 years.

The Netherlands was the only European country which was allowed to
continue trade with Japan during its seclusion period.

Because of this historically unique bond, most of the Japanese have an amicable feeling toward the Netherlands as the country which brought us European culture and science.

We have to acknowledge, however, during those 400 years, there has been a very difficult time as well, and as a consequence of this I understand you have been and still are suffering.

As Japanese ambassador to the Netherlands, I feel that I have the responsibility to talk about this difficult part of our history with sincerity, without averting our eyes from the facts.

At the same time, I am proud of the fact that Japan has taken a path as a peace-loving country for 70 years since the end of World War II.

We strongly believe that Japan's prosperous future can only be found through our strenuous efforts toward the peace and stability of the international community.

With this in mind Japan has contributed to the peace and prosperity of the region and the world through our cooperation for development, respecting our shared values such as democracy, human rights, and rule of law.

As we strongly believe that it is essential to promote the understanding of the present Japan in order to show the world that Japan had chosen a new path after World War II, the Government of Japan started the invitation program for the Dutch war victims.

The preceding program of the "Japan - Netherlands Peace Exchange Program" was the "Peace, Friendship, and Exchange Initiative" launched by then Prime Minister Murayama in 1994, one year before the fiftieth

anniversary of the end of the war.

Looking squarely at the history of our relations with other nations, while keeping the need to foster mutual understanding and trust in mind, the Japanese government started the "Peace, Friendship, and Exchange Initiative".

Under the Initiative, an invitation program for the Dutch war victims started as a 10 year program.

With this program, 452 Dutch war victims visited Japan from 1995 to 2004.

This invitation program contributed greatly to the reconciliation between Japan and the Netherlands and thus gained the support of both the people of Japan and the Netherlands.

In 2005 we decided to extend this 10 year program under a new title: the "Japan - Netherlands Peace Exchange Program".

Thanks to your support and cooperation, this year marks the 10th anniversary of this new program.

In this commemorative year, we renew our determination to strengthen and solidify the ground of the reconciliation.

In October 2014, Their Majesties King Willem-Alexander and Queen Máxima visited Japan as state guests and during the state banquet the King touched upon the reconciliation efforts as follows:

"Acknowledging the suffering of others provides a foundation for reconciliation.

Many in Japan and the Netherlands have actively worked to foster such reconciliation, enabling new trust to grow."

I am proud to say that we, especially you, are the very persons H.M King Willem-Alexander referred to, the persons who have played an important role in this.

I appreciate your willingness to step forward and join this program to see the present Japan and to talk with Japanese people.

With your participation, though it might not have been easy, this program played an integral part in this reconciliation process.

I also would like to express my appreciation for the members of the Advisory Committee for your continuous support and advice.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the Dutch Government for its appreciation of this program.

It is a great joy for me to have an opportunity to see you; some of you I have met already during my time in the Netherlands as Ambassador. I hope you will have a wonderful time with us today and personally I am looking forward to speaking with you.

Thank you.