

Mr Ambassador, ladies and gentlemen members of the Embassy of Japan, members of the Advisory Committee and the Dutch Government, my fellow travellers,

It is a great honor to be in your residency again, Mr Ambassador. And it is a great honor to be standing here and to have the opportunity to say a few words on behalf of all the travellers who went to Japan in the last ten years because of the Peace Exchange Program.

When I said "yes" to this request, I asked myself: how can I speak on behalf of people I don't know; what are the things that bind us together, us, all those women and men who have accepted your invitation to go.

First of all, most of us have lived in Japanese warcamps; some of us had to live a difficult life outside of those camps. And in one way or another we have been marked by those early warexperiences.

There is another very important similarity: we all have been processing those experiences. We have been reading, we have been writing, we have had therapy, we have gone to reunions of the different camps, in short: we have been busy, in different ways and also in different intensities.

And..... we have had a longing to do something else, a longing to go on one of your Peace Exchange voyages to Japan.

And we all had the courage, we had the guts, to accept your invitation when it came.

Because you know, Mr Ambassador, it is not nothing to accept this invitation. For me personally it was not possible to be anywhere near a Japanese person, whoever he or she was. So what to do in a country full of those persons! I really did not know what would happen with me. And then the big surprise: except for one little moment I have not been afraid at all! And more surprise: I loved being in your country.

Of course there is the one very important fact that binds us all: we are so thankful for your invitation to go to Japan, for the warm reception we experienced there, for the care with which you prepared and organised our program, for the words that were spoken to us, words of welcome but also of sincere regret of the things that happened during the war. I think that for everybody or for almost everybody these voyages are a healing experience.

I would like to end on a personal note.

I went to Japan, occupied with my own history. I went as a victim. But once there, I also met the terrible suffering of the Japanese people. And I understood more deeply than ever how imperfect we are, how imperfect the human race is, how terrible the things we do to each other. Of course you only have to read the papers, to watch television to know this. But there, in your country, on this Peace Exchange voyage I felt it in the depth of my being. And strange as it may be, I felt a deep remorse. Because of this experience I have become a more compassionate and a more forgiving person.

I have said it before, Mr Ambassador, and I will say it again: I think that the Peace Exchange Program, in offering these voyages to Dutch campsurvivors, also serves a higher purpose, a purpose that in its own way serves mankind. It may be a drop in the ocean, but mankind needs those drops!

So thank you, you and the Japanese Embassy and the Japanese Government and all the Japanese and Dutch people who help to sustain this program.

I bow deeply to you.

Thank you.