

Speech by His Majesty the King at the state banquet on the occasion of the State Visit to Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan, Tokyo, 29 October 2014

Your Majesty,

It is a great pleasure for my wife and I to be here as your and Empress Michiko's guests. And we are all the more grateful that Crown Prince Naruhito and Princess Masako are here to welcome us too. I have visited your country on many occasions. But this is the first time that I am here as King of the Netherlands. Our first State Visit outside Europe is to your country. A country with which we share a unique history and – we are sure – a successful future.

Let me quote a haiku written in 1679 by the great poet Basho:

Orando mo
Hana ni kinikeri
Uma ni kura

The Dutchmen too have
come to see the cherry blooms
Saddle my horse!

It is now autumn, not spring. Yet I wanted to bring this poem to mind. It recalls a time when the Dutch were the only Westerners permitted to enter your country.

For over 200 years, the Dutch trading post of Deshima was the only link between Japan and the West. A narrow bridge between two worlds – two civilisations. A bridge which carried not only spices, sugar, textiles and copper, but also books, instruments, artworks, knowledge and ideas.

The city of Nagasaki deserves praise for the restoration of this historic site and the reconstruction of the bridge. I hope I'll get a chance to walk across it one day.

Deshima was the place where we learnt each other's language and studied each other's science and culture. An important role was played here by Japan's *rangakusha*, who studied Western learning through Dutch texts. In fact, a man who spoke Dutch - the renowned Fukuzawa Yukichi – graces your 10,000 yen notes to this day. It is fascinating to think that

for so many years, the Empire of Japan looked out at the Western world through a small Dutch window.

Your Majesty,

Even when Japan opened up to the rest of the world, the relationship between our countries remained close. For instance in the fields of medical science and water management. The Dutch engineer Johannis de Rijke is still famous in your country. We realise, though, that even back then, Japan had a long tradition of hydraulic expertise. Deshima, for example, was an engineering triumph. An artificial island in the sea, built on piles, which survived many a typhoon.

We will not forget the history of our forefathers. Their hard work, their creativity, their achievements and their interaction shaped the world in which we now live. Their history will never be 'over'. Its fruits will remain with us – both the sweet and the bitter.

So we will not forget – *cannot* forget – the experiences of Dutch civilians and soldiers in the Second World War. The wounds inflicted in those years continue to overshadow many people's lives. Grief for the victims endures to this day. Memories of imprisonment, forced labour and humiliation have left scars on the lives of many. The Japanese people, too, suffered terribly during the war, especially in the final phase, marked by such destructive violence.

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.

For centuries, a tiny bridge only five metres wide was the only link between our two countries. Today, countless bridges of friendship and partnership connect Japan and the Netherlands. Across the seas, the skies and cyberspace.

Over 450 Japanese businesses are active in the Netherlands. They directly employ over 35,000 Dutch people. In turn, Dutch entrepreneurs and experts are contributing to economic advances in Japan. We are working closely to find sustainable sources of energy. The Netherlands is also glad to be able to help rebuild the horticulture sector in Miyagi, one of the regions hit so hard by the tsunami in 2011.

A key issue in both Japan and the Netherlands is how to safeguard prosperity and quality of life in an ageing society. It will take brain power and resolve to ensure sustainable growth in the long term. The reforms that are needed are not simple. But if there are two countries that can inspire one another in this field, they are Japan and the Netherlands. When I look at the dynamic role played by designers, researchers, artists and creative entrepreneurs in our two countries, I think: together we can achieve so much. I hope that our visit will help drive this idea home.

The same applies to our joint commitment to the international legal order, and to peace and security. Japan is dedicated to peace and is examining the best way to foster peace in today's world, with a more proactive contribution. The Netherlands appreciates these efforts and we recall with admiration the humanitarian role played by Japan in Al Mutannah between 2004 and 2006. There, in Iraq, our troops worked side by side.

Your Majesty,

The tone for our cooperation was set over four centuries ago by Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu. In 1609 he wrote to my ancestor Prince Maurits: 'If two countries strive to achieve the same goal, surely there can be no objection, however far apart they might lie. Your vessels may anchor in every port. Let us from now on deepen our friendship even more.'

That age-old wish is one that we share.

I should like to invite everyone present to raise their glasses to your health, Your Majesty, to the health of Empress Michiko and of the members of your family. May the friendship between Japan and the Netherlands blossom and bear fruit in the years to come!

Thank you.