

Speech by Ankie Broekers-Knol, President of the Eerste Kamer (Senate) of the States General of the Netherlands, on the occasion of the National Foundation Day (Gaecheonjeol) of the Republic of Korea (3rd of October)

Amsterdam, 14th of November 2018

귀하의 존경하는 대사
Honourable Ambassador,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to be invited to speak on the occasion of the National Foundation Day - Gaecheonjeol - of the Republic of Korea, especially at this wonderful venue, the Van Gogh Museum.

On October 3rd Korea celebrated its National Foundation Day or Opening of the Sky Day. This day - over 4000 years ago - the sky opened and Hwanung, son of the Lord of Heaven, descended to earth, landed near a sandalwood tree on Baekdu Mountain and founded Sinsi, the 'City of God'. His son Dangun formed the first Kingdom of Gojoseon in 2333 BC. This foundation myth is at the heart of the yearly celebrations.

Korea has a very long and rich history. In the Netherlands and the rest of the Western world little was known about the country though, until the early 17th century. The first known Dutch record for trade relations was in 1610 when Prince Maurits approved a request from the Dutch East India Company to start trading with Korea.

When Hendrick Hamel and 35 other men were captivated in 1653 after their vessel *De Sperwer* was wrecked by a storm and landed on the Korean island Jeju, the Dutch learned more about the isolated peninsula. For many years Hamels journal was the only source of information about

Korea and its people. Hamels fame in Korea has only been matched by that other Dutchman, Guus Hiddink, the coach of the successful Korean national football team.

In recent times the bond between Korea and the Netherlands was forged during what we in the Netherlands call 'the Korean war' that started in 1950. Dutch soldiers fought for the freedom of the Koreans.

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Korea and the Netherlands have been officially established in 1961 and were intensified 55 years later in 2016 with the 'Comprehensive and Future-oriented Partnership'. The trade relations between our countries include areas such as nuclear energy, smart farming, new and renewable energy and the creative industry.

One example of Korean-Dutch cooperation are the new doors to the enlarged sea lock in IJmuiden. The doors were built in Korea. 76 meters in length, 24 meters high and 11 meters wide. Three weeks ago the doors were shipped to the Netherlands. They will travel the former Dutch East India Route along Cape of Good Hope, the route Hendrick Hamel once sailed.

Honourable Ambassador,

The past year has seen tremendous changes in the relationship between the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The talks between the two leaders were promising. It even resulted in a united Korean team during the Olympic Winter Games in Pyeongchang in February, under the same flag: sport unites. In recent months concern is growing that the current situation is still a fragile one.

Vincent van Gogh once wrote that 'great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together'. The smaller and bigger steps your country and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have taken will hopefully lead to lasting peace on the Korean peninsula, not only for the benefit of the Korean people, but also for the benefit of the rest of the world.

As I understand by cheering the three 'mansae' on National Foundation Day - that is: for Korea, for harmony and for peaceful reunification -, this hope for peace is at the core of the Gaecheonjeol celebrations.

Honourable Ambassador,

I congratulate the Republic of Korea and all Koreans with this National Foundation Day. In the Netherlands we cherish the excellent bond between our two countries. We do hope and trust that this bond will remain close for many years to come.

It is an honour to celebrate this important day with you.

축하해

Congratulations.

Thank you.