

We thank the Japanese Government for making this journey possible.  
Our group of 18 pilgrims received a courteous reception and your gracious hospitality and the impeccable lodgings made us feel at home.  
It all came together under the guidance of our unforgettable hostesses and interpreters Ayako and Maya. With their care and warmth they made us feel like one big family.

You Japanese people surely know how to make us feel welcome!  
Right from the start, the pupils of Yoshi Elementary School in Mizumaki conquered our hearts with their enthusiastic flag-waving reception.  
When little Yuta put his hand in mine to walk me through the winding hallway to the meeting room at the end, I felt moved to tears.  
We felt touched by cordial warmth of the principal and teachers.

We spent the entire morning in the midst of children.  
They played their games for us, they taught us calligraphy, they danced for us, we had lunch with them.  
We looked in their eyes, shining with the happiness of childhood, we saw their eagerness, we read their mischief, we felt their trustfulness.  
We felt one with them, identified with them.  
We recognized ourselves, the children **we** were, 75 years ago.....

But then, we were not allowed to remain that way.  
Our children's world came to an abrupt end.  
We were robbed of our zest for life.  
We learned to fear, instead of trust.  
We were denied the opportunity to learn.

Some of us lost our Mother, some lost both parents.  
One of us saw his Mother raped, right in front of him.  
We all saw our Mothers humiliated, forced to stand in the blazing sun for hours, saw them beaten by cruel men with long swords.  
We were hungry, we were scared, we learned to hate.  
We became skeletons, with bloated bellies.

And then, after years of misery, fear and terror, the threat ceased and life beckoned again.

But some of the horror, hatred and poison, deposited deep inside, remained:  
A permanent venom.

For more than 70 years now, we have carried this burden,  
wrestled with it, dreamed of it.  
All this time we tried to lighten the load, drain that abscess.....

This past week, spent under the auspices of the Japan-Netherlands  
Peace Exchange Program and realized through the benevolent generosity  
of the Japanese Government has helped so much:

The stirring flower-laying ceremony at the Cross Monument in Mizumaki,  
the welcome reception, hosted by the local committee to promote Peace and  
Culture,  
where we met the charismatic chairman Mr Korukama.  
The tea ceremony the next day at the Ashiyagama no Sato with the beautiful  
Surrounding gardens, showed us a Japan, worthy of respect and admiration.

The day we visited the Nagasaki Peace Park and the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb  
Museum  
Was the most moving day of our visit.  
Another highlight was the visit with Chuo University.  
We saw the strength and promise of the new Japan, the real Japan,  
so different from the nightmare of our past.

We want to take the opportunity and go forward from here.  
Let us build on the history and culture shared by our two peoples,  
the Japanese and the Dutch.

As a token of the rich cultural heritage of the Netherlands and its many links  
with Japan, we would like to present you with this carefully composed,  
beautifully executed book, representing some of the treasures in the  
Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the capital of our country.