

Toespraak Z.E. Hong Seok-in tijdens de Herdenking VOKS 10 juni 2025

Honored veterans,

Mr. Gommers, President of the VOKS, Brigadier General Hoefsloot, Director of the Dutch Veterans Institute, Lieutenant Colonel Duchateau), Commander of the Regiment Van Heutsz, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,
Goedemorgen!

It is a great honor for me to stand with you for the first time today at this meaningful event as the newly appointed Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Among my many responsibilities as Ambassador, one of the most significant, and one that holds a special place in my heart, is meeting with Korean War veterans.

It is an honor to express my deepest gratitude and sincere respect to you in person. Being here with you today and speaking these words directly to you means a great deal to me.

Seventy-five years ago, the war that broke out on the Korean Peninsula brought immense hardship to our nation. But even in those darkest days, Korea was not alone. The Netherlands, among other UN member states, stood up to help. Notably, the Netherlands was one of the very first countries to respond swiftly to the UN Security Council resolution by deciding to send troops to aid a distant and unfamiliar country, Korea.

A total of 5,322 young Dutch soldiers volunteered and boarded ships bound for Korea to nobly defend the value of democracy. Despite the harsh and perilous conditions they faced, they stood firm with unwavering courage.

But this act of solidarity came at a heavy cost. 125 Dutch soldiers were killed in action, and more than 600 were wounded. On behalf of the government and people of the Republic of Korea, I extend our deepest respect and gratitude to all who bravely fought for Korea's freedom and peace.

Your remarkable valor, particularly in battles such as *Hoengseong* and the surrounding areas, is deeply remembered by the Korean people. Today, the monument dedicated to Dutch forces in *Hoengseong* serves not only as a symbol of that memory but also as a lasting reminder to future generations.

Honored veterans,

The Republic of Korea has risen from the ashes of war to achieve remarkable development. From one of the poorest nations in the world, Korea has become one of the world's top ten economies. Seoul has transformed into a global metropolis. Freedom and democracy has taken firm root, and Korean culture is beloved by people all over the world. This progress stands as a testament to your sacrifice and dedication.

Your service also laid the foundation for the strong and enduring friendship between Korea and the Netherlands. Recently, I had the privilege of presenting my credentials to His Majesty King *Willem-Alexander*.

During our meeting, His Majesty fondly recalled the State Visit of the Korean President in 2023, and especially the special meeting with Dutch Korean War veterans held at the Royal Palace in Amsterdam. He described it as "a deeply meaningful and moving occasion." His words reminded me once again how your devotion continues to shape and strengthen the special bond between our two countries.

The Korean War was once called 'The Forgotten War.' However, we, and our future generations, will never forget this war.

In this regard, I extend my sincere gratitude to VOKS and the Regiment Van Heutsz for organizing this important gathering every year. Thanks to your efforts, the courage and dedication of the Korean War veterans are being vividly conveyed to Dutch society and future generations.

The government and the Embassy of the Republic of Korea will continue its efforts to honor and remember the Dutch veterans.

We, the Korean people, know all too well what might have happened on the Korean Peninsula without your help. We carry our gratitude forward from generation to generation.

Dear veterans,

You deserve to be proud of being Korean War veteran. Your sacrifices live on in our nation's freedom, peace, and prosperity. For this, you will always be remembered as true heroes.

I wish you all continued good health and happiness.

Dank u wel. Thank you very much.