



Toespraak

van de Voorzitter van de Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, prof.dr. J.A. Bruijn, ter gelegenheid van de viering van de Nationale feestdag van Japan bij de Ambassade van Japan in Nederland

datum 21 februari 2024

Honourable Ambassador,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the invitation to speak tonight at this festive occasion for Japan and the Japanese people.

Today's celebration falls right in the middle of two important dates, as I understand:

The 11th of February is the Japanese Foundation Day, and on February 23 His Majesty the Emperor of Japan celebrates his birthday.

As I read into the history of Foundation Day, I found that the mythical Emperor Jimmu is believed to have established Japan on the 11th of February in the year 660 BC, 2684 years ago.

Emperor Jimmu united what would become the nation of Japan, together with his older brothers. They traveled through Japan's four main islands and finally established Jimmu's empire in Yamato, what is now considered to be one of the oldest regions in Japan.

In 2019 I was fortunate enough to be able to visit Japan - although not that particular area - when I participated in the P20, the parliamentary dimension of the G20. Ms Akiko Santo, the President of the House of Councillors - comparable to the Dutch Senate - welcomed my colleague from the House of Representatives and myself.

I have fond memories of the conference and the hospitality of my Japanese colleague. Conferences like the P20, but also meetings like today!, form an important part of what I like to call 'parliamentary diplomacy'.

The geopolitical situation in the world today is precarious. People are for instance worried about the consequences of migration and climate change, and about their livelihood. Not only in the Netherlands, but in countries across the world. And these insecurities lead to friction in many parts of the world: inside countries and between countries.

This is cause for concern. And this is also where diplomacy plays such an important role. It is interesting to see that good diplomatic contacts between for instance democratic countries in Asia and in Europe become more and more valuable.

That's is why I believe that international conferences, state visits and events like tonight, are of ever more importance.

Dear Ambassador,

Thank you once again for inviting me to deliver this speech. It provides me with an opportunity to also say something about the Japanese national anthem that has so wonderfully been performed just now.

The lyrics of 'Kimigayo' sing of the reign of His Majesty the Emperor. As I understand this anthem is the shortest in the world, with just one verse, while the Dutch national anthem is one of the longest. We only sing the first of the official 15 verses...

I must therefore follow your lead, Mr Ambassador, in the spirit of the Japanese anthem, and not prolong my speech any further.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please let us drink to the friendship between Japan and the Netherlands and to the importance of diplomacy!