

**Speech to be given by Mrs Yvonne E.M.A. Timmerman-Buck,
President of the Dutch Senate and leader of the Dutch
parliamentary delegation to Australia (7-15 October 2006), during
the dinner given by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of
the House of Representatives and other presiding officers of the
Parliament of Australia in Canberra on Wednesday 11 October 2006**

Honourable President, Honourable Speaker, distinguished colleagues,

On behalf of the Dutch parliamentary delegation I would like to thank you warmly for the exceptionally hospitable reception accorded to our delegation, for the splendid programme that you have arranged for us during our stay and for the friendly words of welcome you have just spoken.

The commemoration of the 400th anniversary of relations between our two countries has led to many reciprocal visits by numerous of our fellow countrymen in recent months. For example, our Prime Minister, Mr Balkenende, visited your country in April, our Minister of Education and Culture was here in May, and members of the Dutch House of Representatives paid a working visit to your Parliament and other institutions in the spring.

In addition, numerous representatives of our two countries from the world of business and commerce and from the worlds of sport and the arts have taken part in exchange programmes, symposiums and exhibitions organised in connection with this jubilee year. At the start of the commemoration year your Foreign Minister the Honourable Alexander Downer was our guest of honour and just two weeks ago the Governor-General of Australia His Excellency Michael Jeffery honoured us by paying our country an official visit. In just over two weeks' time His Royal Highness the Prince of Orange and Her Royal Highness Princess Maxima will be your guests.

We are gratified by the existence of so many good contacts and relations between so many people from so many different sectors of our societies. They emphasise and mark the fact that Australia and the Netherlands share something special: four centuries of uninterrupted, good and cordial relations. This is yet another reason why we were so pleased to accept your invitation to visit your Parliament and your country in the context of the commemoration of our 400 years of relations.

Honourable President, Honourable Speaker, distinguished colleagues,

At first sight there are few countries in the world that differ so much from one another as Australia and the Netherlands. In terms of geographical distance we could hardly be further apart on the globe. The Netherlands is a cold and wet country whereas Australia is the world's driest continent. Australia is one of the least densely populated countries in the world, with fewer than three inhabitants to every square kilometre. By contrast the Netherlands has an average of 480 inhabitants per square

kilometre. And Australia is 158 times larger than the Netherlands. So at first sight we seem to be one another's opposites.

But appearances are deceptive and the reality is different! Let me demonstrate this by means of a few examples. Our economies are of roughly the same size and both are more than 70% dependent on the services sector. Furthermore, our economies are closely interwoven. Measured in terms of size of investment, the Netherlands are the fourth largest investor in Australia. And for Australia the Netherlands are the most important springboard to the markets of the European Union. For Dutch companies Australia is the gateway to Asia.

At present the Netherlands have over 16 million inhabitants and Australia has some 20 million. The living standards of our inhabitants are virtually identical.

Both our countries have a long history of immigration, as a result of which our populations are of a richly diverse backgrounds and composition. At the same time, our societies cherish the same values: freedom, democracy, respect for human rights, tolerance and solidarity with the disadvantaged in society. These are values that we have declared applicable to the societies within the borders of our countries, but both Australia and the Netherlands have traditionally been convinced that these values are also important in choosing their role and position in the international world order. Based on this conviction your country seeks constructive cooperation with partners and partner countries in the Asian region, some of which have different cultures and religions and hold different values. In the realisation that freedom and democracy, human rights and solidarity also have an international dimension, the Netherlands have made every effort since the Second World War to promote economic cooperation and integration as the main paths towards peace and stability in the continent of Europe.

Together Australia and the Netherlands are partners in Afghanistan, where in very difficult circumstances we are focusing our joint efforts on achieving safety and stability for the population of Oruzgan Province and on the rebuilding of houses and infrastructure.

Honourable President, Honourable Speaker, distinguished colleagues and friends,

I would like to mention one more interesting and striking similarity between our two countries: our parliamentary systems are both bicameral and our parliaments have an almost identical number of members; both our Houses of Representatives have 150 members and the Australian Senate has 76 members and the Dutch Senate 75 members. As you can probably imagine, this was yet another reason why we quickly felt at home here in your Parliament House.

What has struck our delegation in all meetings and talks with fellow parliamentarians, ministers, civil servants, business people, officials and citizens both in Melbourne and here in Canberra is the great openness and at the same time great curiosity with which our counterparts have greeted us. We Dutch people have a reputation for being rather direct in our conversations and actions. It has struck me personally that this is a characteristic that is to some extent shared by many Australians. As a result,

our discussions and exchanges of views have quickly gained momentum and been exceptionally effective, instructive and pleasant.

Honourable President, Honourable Speaker, distinguished colleagues and friends,

With your leave I would therefore conclude that our two countries are not opposites but natural partners. These friendly ties date originally from 1606 when the crew of the ship 'De Duyfken' (the little Dove) first set foot on Australian soil. And this partnership has since been continued and confirmed. We were neighbours in the period when Indonesia was shown on the map of the world as the Dutch East Indies. And slightly later our countries were allies in the Second World War. In the post-war period we have frequently acted as allies in many different international forums.

After the Second World War many thousands of Dutch people settled in Australia in order to build a future for themselves and for their children. This gave the existing ties between our countries an even more tangible and human element. Nowadays the ease of international travel and the use of the Internet have made these ties even more intense and frequent.

Honourable President, Honourable Speaker, distinguished colleagues and friends,

In this jubilee year we look back with joy, interest and satisfaction at these good and long-lasting relations. But we also wish to look forwards. Our ties of friendship and partnership are of great significance to our future. This applies to us as partners in a global economy, but it also applies even more to our joint efforts in the name of peace, security and human dignity. I would like to express the heartfelt wish that we as parliamentarians make our contribution to these joint efforts.

Once again, I would like to thank you on behalf of the Dutch delegation for your tremendous hospitality and for the exceptionally interesting programme that you have laid on for us in the past few days.

I would now like to ask you to join me in drinking a toast to Her Majesty the Queen of Australia, to the future of the people of Australia and to good relations between our countries and our parliaments.